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# PALMS.

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*NINTH THOUSAND.*

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## **DEDICATION.**

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**TO THE**

**REV. EDWARD E. SORIN,**

**FATHER-GENERAL OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY CROSS,  
WHO, HAVING DONE FOR THE CAUSE OF RELIGION AND EDUCATION IN THE  
GREAT NORTH-WEST AN APOSTOLIC AND ILLUSTRIOUS WORK, IS SPARED  
TO SEE THE HARVESTS SOWN IN HIS YOUTH GROW AND STRENGTHEN,  
AND INCREASE AND RIPEN, UNTIL THE "DESERT HAS BEEN MADE  
TO BLOSSOM AS THE ROSE," AND HIS AGE CROWNED WITH A  
FRUITION SELDOM VOUCHSAFED TO THE SERVANTS OF  
GOD ON EARTH, THIS STORY IS DEDICATED WITH  
SENTIMENTS OF PROFOUND RESPECT BY  
THE AUTHOR,  
ANNA HANSON DORSEY.**



# PALMS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A ROMAN VILLA.

A ROUGH road, which at certain curves overlooked the Tiber, wound steeply up the Aventine to a plateau, where it abruptly terminated in front of a double gateway of massive bronze, which, superbly wrought in open yet solid and graceful designs, admitted a view of the villa and gardens it protected. Not an unobstructed view, however; for great boughs of old chestnut and ilex trees, which shaded the broad avenue, intervened here and there, allowing only glimpses of a marble façade, of a portico with clustered pillars, and some gilded balconies; while, stretching away on every side, vistas of terraces all abloom with many-hued flowers, fountains tossing their spray in the sunshine, and fair statues gleaming out from the green shadows of tremulous vines, enchanted the eye.

The great bronze gates were thrown open, as if for the admission of illustrious guests who had come in state, in ivory-mounted and gilded chariots—such as the Roman patricians used—to visit the lord of this fair estate. Distinguished



they must be indeed, for even the porter was absent from his post ; gone doubtless to snatch a glimpse of noble senators and jewelled ladies as they stepped from their chariots through the portico into the rich and lofty apartments, where the most honored guests were received.

A grassy expanse, profusely sprinkled with wild violets, such as bloom only under the Roman sun, and yellow cistus, sloped away from the shady avenue to the garden terraces and winding walks, each one by the combined efforts of art and nature more beautiful than the last. Groups of pomegranates full of scarlet flowers contrasted with the cream-tinted blooms and dark waxen leaves of the magnolias that grew near them ; the sweet olive and almond trees in full snowy blossom clustered together ; here was a plantation of lime trees, there one of orange, filling the air with fragrance ; and apart from all these, as if keeping watch and ward over the scene, more than one tall ilex towered. Feathery palms, fountains, and roses that rivalled in beauty and fragrance the far-famed roses of Pæstum, surprised and delighted the eye at every turn ; while on the confines of the grounds a grove of pines, cypresses, and mulberry trees climbed the rocky hill, giving a sombre charm to its ruggedness. and at the same time affording a background which threw out in stronger, brighter relief the lavish beauty outspread before it. Through all the lovely spaces statues gleamed whitely, or

seemed to tremble with life under the flickering golden shadows cast through the leaves above them. A path of colored pebbles led along a curve of the hill to a cascade leaping from its source high up among the rocks—just where a storm-riven cypress had fallen, as if to let in the sunshine upon it—into a moss-covered stone basin, so skillfully constructed that it looked like an accident of nature. In its swift descent, smiting the rocks with silvery music as it fell, it looked like spangled gauze lightly swayed by the summer breeze. The air was full of languorous fragrance; the finches carolled their love-songs among the limes; and a nightingale, poised on the topmost bough of an ilex, poured out strains of melody that might have been stolen from the lyre of Orpheus.

From the cascade a wide walk, tessellated with black and yellow marble, led to a plateau that overhung a steep descent—the terminus of the garden on that side—which was protected by a parapet of some hard red stone gracefully cut and polished, and in keeping with its surroundings. From this point the view was extensive and commanding. Below lay the city, and far away the country beyond—the imperial city, with its temples in honor of the gods, its columns and triumphal arches, its treasures of Grecian art, its monuments of Roman power; “its spoils and trophies of the Punic and Gallic wars”; its dread altars, sacred to the rites of their mytho-

logical creed ; its palaces, its stately Capitol, and surrounded by groups of magnificent Temples and palaces the Forum, where, it was the popular delusion to believe, Justice guarded the laws and liberties of the people with eternal vigilance. Beyond the city stretched the Campagna, the monotony of its wide extent broken harmoniously by the aqueducts, and the shadows thrown by their great arches over the verdant plain, where red and purple anemones and the yellow cistus bloomed in wild profusion ; and a few scattered ruins overgrown by wisterias and wall-flowers, with olive trees as old as Romulus grouped about them, showing the site of ancient cities levelled ages ago by the advance of conquering hosts. In the distance, through the transparent misty veil that shimmered over them, rose the Alban hills ; beyond these the Sabine summits, crested with snow. Woods rank with verdure, trending southward, outlined the boundary of the plain on one side ; there, like a belt of emerald, stretched the deadly marshes, and far westward glimmered the sea.

It was like a dream of enchantment, all this beauty, these far-reaching views under the blue sky, steeped in the splendor of the Roman sunshine.

But how silent were the beautiful gardens ! how hushed, except for the silvery tinkling of fountains and the carolling of birds ! Not a human sound ! Was the place consecrated to

Pan? Was its sacred soil pressed only by the feet of the gods? The villa appeared as deserted and silent as the gardens, although it was the hour when the pleasure-loving Romans, with their sensuous perceptions of all that is bright and beautiful, lived in the open air. Outside its walls there was no sign of life; from within, no sounds to indicate that distinguished and princely visitors were being entertained in the luxurious fashion the Romans delighted in, to the measures of soft instrumental music, and voices of song.

The villa, with its fair and picturesque surroundings, was the summer abode of a wealthy Roman patrician, named Nemesius (his *prænomen* tradition does not give), who had already distinguished himself in the military service of the Empire. When on duty in or near Rome, it was in this favorite spot that he and his young wife spent their days in the realization of an almost idyllic happiness. She was not only beautiful and endowed with many noble qualities, but the blood of one of the Cæsars flowed in her veins, losing nothing of its fire and spirit, which, however, no untoward circumstances had aroused—happily for her—to disturb her unclouded life. People used to predict that in the future Rome would have in her another Cornelia, her virtues were so blent with a certain modest dignity, which was not the offspring of pride, but of an elevated nature. Her companionship lured Nemesius from the baser pleasures of the

young patricians, and awakened in his mind the ambition to fill out her high ideal of a true man. They both honored the gods: they burnt incense before them on their household altars, they offered libations to secure their favor, they crowned the statues of their *Penates* with fresh garlands daily, and attended the grand ceremonials held in the temples in honor of their deities. It was a false religion, but they knew no other; and, while practising the maxims of the best pagan philosophy, they had no desire to indulge in the license it allowed its votaries.

Here in their summer retreat on the Aventine, Nemesius and Claudia passed their days so blissfully it seemed incredible that even the Fates could possess the power to penetrate the barriers erected by Love around their home; and if such a suggestion ever presented itself to the mind of either, it was instantly banished to the shades. But even then, on that fair summer eve, while the birds sang and the fountains sparkled in the level sunbeams; while a luminous, infinite mystery seemed to veil the far-off spaces, and the flower-scented air brooded like a life-giving balm over all the strange silence, and long shadows began to steal along the slopes blue with violets, a nearer approach to the villa exhibited signs not only of human occupation, but of some impending woe. The numerous slaves of the household moved noiselessly about, with pale, frightened faces, speaking only in low whispers

to each other as they passed to and fro on hurried errands ; the women who were the personal attendants of their mistress suppressed their sobs, but did not restrain their tears, as they crouched listening and expectant on the broad marble staircase leading to the upper apartments ; men, with sunbrowned faces, and hands roughened by labor, stood about in silent groups, amongst them the porter, whose duty it was to keep the great bronze gates at the entrance of the avenue. He had left them wide open, as if illustrious guests in their chariots of ivory and gold had passed through ; but only one visitor had entered the villa, not through the bronze gates, nor seen of any—a king having power that no mortal might withstand, be he high or low, powerful or weak ; his brow was crowned with asphodel and poppies, and his name was Death.

In her favorite sitting-room, where she had passed so many of her happiest days, the beautiful young wife of Nemesius lay dying. The couch on which she reposed, draped with gold-embroidered silk, had been drawn out into the middle of the room for air. The most lavish adornments and priceless treasures in ivory, lapis lazuli, and ebony inlaid with gold ; hangings of Persian silks, and cunningly-woven mats of rich dyes from the far East ; Etrurian vases and graceful statues, completed the furnishing of the spacious apartment, mocking by their splendor and their sacred association with her

brief dream of happiness the pale, recumbent figure in their midst, over whose features the white shadows of approaching dissolution were stealing, without impairing, but rather rendering more perfect in beauty, their rare classic outline. Those upon whom the shadow of death falls have strange, restless fancies, it is said; hers was to be brought here; and Nemesis, who denied her nothing, had her couch removed—himself assisting, lest the least jar should increase her suffering—and placed according to her desire. Clinging to his hand as he leaned over her, his face almost as white as hers, and set in lines of stern, unspeakable grief—clinging as if so Fate could not separate them, she whispered: "I can not leave thee! Beseech the gods that they spare me."

"Sacrifice is being offered for thee at this moment," he said, biting back the fury of his grief, while the veins of his forehead stood out like cords; for he saw how vain it would be.

On the other side of the couch knelt a pale, sorrow-stricken woman, who held a vase of pungent perfume, in which she wet a napkin to wipe off the cold sweat from the face of her dying mistress; for she was her favorite slave, also her faithful friend. The physician—the most skilful disciple of Æsculapius in Rome, who had brought with him from Egypt and Greece mysterious secrets of the healing art, and had performed some wonderful cures—stood near the

dying Claudia, appalled to discover that all his efforts to save her were powerless: not a pang could he relieve, nor curb a single one of the wild heart-throbs that tore her breast. Then, just as the sun flung his golden flicker through the vines, making a tremulous glory over the wall opposite the wide-open window, the faint wail of a newborn infant was heard; the dying head, with its wealth of silky gold-tinted hair, sank back upon the pillows; there was a surcease of agony, and the peaceful, august majesty of death diffused a wonderful calm over the white face, which but a few moments ago was wrung with pain. She drew her disordered robe across her bosom, and folded her long, beautiful hands upon it; she felt that she was dying, and she would pass to the shades as became the dignity of a Roman matron.

“Keep the babe, Zilla; keep it in your heart of hearts. Never give it—to the—care of another,” she whispered; “my faithful Zilla!” The words sounded like a caress, and the promise was given in a few sentences broken by sobs,—a promise which the dying young mother knew would be sacredly kept. Then, turning to Nemesis, she said, with a look of love that once more kindled the light in her fading eyes, while a smile irradiated her countenance: “Nemesis, we have loved. Farewell!” That was the last; one long, soft sigh, and all was still forever.

Nemesis clasped the lifeless form in his arms,



and, lifting her face to his, called her by all those endearing names to which she had ever fondly responded; but when no answer came, and he noted the film that already dimmed her beautiful eyes, he laid her back on the pillows—she was his no longer—and, covering his face with his hands, went away to his own private apartments to wrestle alone with his grief, a grief without hope, for to the sensuous pagans death ended all. It was only transfigured to them when it made gods and heroes.

The apotheosis of men who perished crowned with glory and renown was a divine triumph over death, the renewal of a life that bestowed immortality and throned them among the gods. It satisfied the proudest ambition of the living to be able to offer divine honors to deceased kindred, as it gave them brotherhood with the deities they worshiped; otherwise the thought of death was one of such inexpressible horror that in speaking of their departed they said "he has lived," and not that he had died.

In a few moments, as if whispered by the air, the sorrowing slaves learned that the gentle and noble wife of Nemesius had ceased to breathe; that she who had protected them from the sometimes oppressive and cruel exactions of their task-masters, and had ever been generous and considerate of them, was no more. Then the pent-up emotions of their warm southern hearts burst forth in wails of sorrow; they thought only

of their own loss, forgetful of his whose loss was far greater, and whose grief was more sacred than theirs; whether their cries would annoy or distress him did not enter their minds, until the old steward Symphronius, himself nearly distracted, drove them out of hearing, and enforced silence on those whose duties required them to remain.

And now, while the short twilight deepened into the purple star-spangled night, the silence of the beautiful gardens, one hour ago steeped in golden sunshine, was broken; low sounds of weeping and plaintive cries of lament echoed through the shadowy alleys, as the sorrowing slaves fled to the more distant recesses and grottoes, where they might vent their grief unmolested.

The days passed on, and Nemeseius, stern and silent in his grief, asked no question about his child. The steward Symphronius, who had been his faithful servitor since his earliest recollection, was the only one of the household admitted to his presence, and he understood without words that silence on his part was expected. The family notary was summoned two or three times to receive instructions relating to the obsequies, which Nemeseius delivered in brief terms, then dismissed him.

Zilla waited day after day, hoping to be summoned to her master's presence; but he made no sign, and, girding up her courage, she deter-

mined to go to him unbidden, having upon her mind something which caused her great anxiety about her infant charge, toward whom her heart went out with tenderest love and pity. The apathy and neglect of Nemesis hurt and exasperated her; but, reasoning like a woman, she thought if he could hear the cause of her anxiety, it would not only remind him of the existence of his offspring, but arouse the natural instincts of affection toward it; this accomplished, she felt sure that he would soon recognize it as a living link between himself and her who was beyond recall, by which a new happiness would be awakened that would soften the asperity of his sorrow, and at last bring consolation to his despairing heart.

Alas for Zilla's sanguine hopes! Symphronius had in vain tried to dissuade her from seeking an interview with his master; he swore by all the infernal gods that she would peril her life, and deserve to lose it if she persisted, to which she quietly and firmly replied: "When Nemesis hears what I have to tell him he will pardon the intrusion. He is a noble gentleman, and I can not believe that he has been transformed to a fury. His own child, too—you forget, Symphronius!" She brushed by him as he stood in the doorway of the antechamber, and, having passed through several darkened rooms, she at last found her master in the smallest one at the end of the suite. He saw her as she entered and

stood before him, her head bowed, her hands crossed upon her breast; the sight of her recalled in all its vividness that sad scene when Claudia breathed her last, and his face grew white and more rigid.

"What brings thee here unbidden?" he asked, in low, hoarse tones.

She began to explain, but at the very first intimation of her errand, he seemed to be seized with a transport of fury. He told her that he would hear nothing of the child, and wished never to see it; he had hoped that it had perished, for it had cost the life of the only being on earth that he loved. Then he ordered her from his presence.

Zilla, who had the hot blood of the South in her veins, felt it going with a wild rush to her head; her eyes flashed, and her heart beat madly, while words of hot indignation rose to her tongue, which might have cost her dear had she uttered them. But, remembering her promise to her dying mistress, and seeing from his thin, haggard face and bloodshot eyes, what havoc grief had made in Nemesius, she held her peace, and, bowing her head, again crossed her hands on her bosom, and left his presence, thinking: "It is only time that can do it; but oh how bitterly will he grieve for not having listened to me to-day!"

"It is best to try for one's self once; the next time one listens to advice," said Symphronius—who had heard all that passed—as Zilla went by.

If she had raised her eyes, she would have discovered an expression in the old steward's yellow face which meant: "You got no more than you deserved for your wilfulness." But she did not look up, so he missed his little triumph.

After the pompous funeral rites, in which nothing was spared to make them magnificent, Nemesius sought an interview with the Emperor, and asked to be appointed to service in Gaul, where the imperial eagles were advancing to fresh conquests. His request was granted with reluctance, for the Emperor disliked detaching him from service in Rome, which frequently brought the brave young captain in personal relation with himself. As true as steel in his loyalty in those days when treachery and conspiracies were common, faithful and brave in his service, unquestioning in his obedience and fidelity, a noble, soldierly-looking, handsome man, Nemesius, unaware of the fact, had frequently attracted the Emperor's favorable notice, who held him in mind to carry out certain designs in and about Rome, which were not yet ripe. But there was no excuse explainable for denying the favor, and after some delay, Nemesius was told that he might make his preparations to leave for the distant scene of warfare,—a permission which he received with a savage sensation of joy, that gave buoyancy to his step, and brought a strange, fierce light into his eye. He sped him away to his notary, to whom he gave directions relating

to the household on the Aventine; he drew up his will in brief, plain terms, and waited until all the legal formula to make it valid was finished, then arose to go. "Remember, the Greek slave, Zilla, is to keep unconditional care of the child; she must not be interfered with. Supply them generously. Tell Symphronius to remain faithful—he has never been otherwise—for I trust and confide in him. Repeat these, my last words, and give him farewell; for I know he will be sorely grieved by my going away without seeing him." These were his last words.

The next day Nemesius rode out of Rome at the head of his legion—the Emperor had promoted him at the last moment—rode away, determined to court death in the front of battle, in desperate charges, in perilous attacks, and at fearful odds. He carried out his intentions until nearly a *lustrum* of desperate warfare had passed, in which he performed prodigies of valor, and won glorious victories out of the very jaws of defeat; but death eluded him, while fame attended all his achievements. His soldiers whispered that he bore a charmed life, that he wore suspended from his neck a magical amulet of great virtue, prepared by the augurs with mysterious rites in the Temple of Mars; but—had they known!—it was only a soft tress of gold-burnished hair framed in crystal and encased in silk, the only figment left to him of all the loveliness he had lost.

The work he came to Gaul to aid being accomplished, Nemesius was ordered to Greece, where revolts were taking place against the Roman rule; there was to be no delay, the dispatches said. His commands were quickly given, and by sunrise he, at the head of his broken legion, was on the march southward. "There, there," he thought, "the waves of Acheron will not fly my feet; there, the infernal gods being propitious, I may find what I vainly sought in barbaric Gaul."

## CHAPTER II.

A SURPRISE—THE VILLA TO BE CLOSED—THE  
VOICE OF THE GODS.

ONE day a low, broad-wheeled wagon, loaded with cypress-wood boxes of various lengths, and drawn by six bullocks, entered the avenue of the Villa Nemesius; it was guarded by two Dacian soldiers—gigantic fellows, from the forests of the Danube—who, as they dashed the sweat from their faces with their huge hands, swore vigorously in their native tongue at the hot sun, and the rocky ascent up which they had been obliged to toil. Their rage increased the rasping discordance of their barbarous speech to such a pitch that the echoes were roused, and the frightened birds overhead flew wildly from bough to bough, not knowing what portents were in the air. The driver—a Roman peasant—grinned with impunity, being in advance of them, otherwise he would have been in danger of broken bones, or worse. The dense shade cast by the trees refreshed men and beasts, and, as the avenue was nearly level, the angry complaints of the Dacians subsided into low growls, and the driver let his beasts follow their instincts, and advance more slowly.

Symphronius the steward was just preparing



for his *siesta* when the sound of wheels grinding the gravel, mingled with loud, angry voices, disturbed the drowsy stillness. He went out, ruffled by the interruption, and the spectacle that greeted his eyes did not tend to sweeten his temper; he was sure that only a stupid mistake could have brought such a cavalcade inside the gates, and, while he stood bottling his wrath until the driver approached within speaking distance, breathed vengeance against the porter for giving it admission. Presently the wagon halted abreast of where he stood, and he demanded to know, "in the name of all the Cyclops and Furies, by what right and by whose orders the driver had brought his rubbish, and savages, and beasts, to tear up the gravel, and trample down everything in their way?"

"I had my orders," replied the driver sullenly, "from one who has the best right to give them, to bring these boxes here, and to say they are to be carefully placed under three ilex trees that stand somewhere near a fountain; and I was told that thou wouldst know the exact spot—that is, if thou art Symphronius, the steward."

"Orders, by Fidius! And whose, may I ask?" he answered, severe sarcasm in every tone. "The Furies fly away with thy rubbish, and the evil eye light upon thee and thy cattle, and barbarians! It's not to be believed that I'll allow a place as beautiful as the Elysian fields to be cut up and trampled down for thy say so. Orders!"

"I had my orders from the great General Nemesius, just home from the foreign wars," was the reply. "Hast thou been sleeping like a mole in the ground, to have heard nothing of the honors the Senate paid him at the Capitol, and he there by the side of the Emperor, and all Rome looking on?" Symphronius was too astonished to interrupt the speaker, who went on: "This rubbish"—nodding his head toward the cypress-wood boxes on the wagon—"this rubbish, as it pleased thee to call it, is some of the spoils he brought from Greece, where he has been fighting for a year. He told me they were statues and the like, and to deliver them carefully, or my life should pay for it; and he sent these great fellows—two of his own soldiers—to unload them. And, moreover, as I am answerable for their safety with my life—which I'm not anxious to lose—I mean to obey his orders."

The breath of Symphronius was nearly gone by the time the man ceased speaking. Nemesius back, and in Rome, and he knowing nothing of it! Was this the way to requite his life-long faithful services? 'To come home after five years' absence, and leave him to hear of his arrival in this sort! But he would show no surprise; this lout and those savages should not even suspect how he had been slighted.

"Good fellow!" said he, "I meant only to test thee. There's no telling what tricks those pestiferous Christians might try to play on an un-

protected household, if all's true that one hears of them. My life's a burden to me, having charge of such responsibilities as the noble Nemesius left on my poor shoulders, and I suspect all strangers until they can give a good account of themselves. Certainly I knew that my brave master was back. Did he not bid me come and witness the honors he received?—and well-deserved say I! And wasn't I the proudest man in Rome that day? And who had a better right, for I carried him in my arms before he could walk, and have been his faithful slave ever since! Come now, let the bullocks and those giants rest in the shade: there's no haste about unloading; and do thou repose on the grass while I fetch out some wine and wheaten bread for thy refreshment."

Almost bursting with the news, which, it is needless to say, he now heard for the first time, Symphronius did not deign to notice the inquiring looks that met him on his way to the wine-vaults, as some of the servants pressed forward full of curiosity as to the cause of the unwonted commotion without. To tell what he knew was something he must enjoy at his leisure, and in his own pompous way he would impress them with the belief that he alone of all the household had been honored with a special message from his master.

The thirsty men drained the amphora of wine that Symphronius set before them, and devoured

the white bread to the last crumb; their good-humor was restored, and, after giving the bullocks generous draughts of water, they went away, guided by the steward, to the spot designated under the three ilex trees, to complete the task for which they had come.

Under the zealous directions of the old steward, instant preparations were made for Neme-sius' reception; for it was not doubted that he would come to the villa at the very earliest opportunity, and it might be at an unexpected moment; so it behooved them not to be caught napping. The long-closed and darkened rooms were thrown open to the sunshine and air; the precious mosaics, the treasures of lapis lazuli, priceless Etrurian vases, the marble Antigone, the ivory Graces, draperies from Persia inwrought with gold, chairs and couches of ebony inlaid with silver in patterns of intricate design, besides many other things rich and rare, were unveiled, and the film of fine gray dust that five years had filtered over them, obscuring their beauty, was patiently and carefully removed, and the steel mirrors polished until every object in the spacious apartments was reflected on their flawless surface. Fresh flowers once more garnished every available spot; garlands wreathed the alabaster pillars, and the statutes were again crowned with the flowers sacred to the deities they represented. A hum of cheerful voices, rippling sounds of laughter, and subdued snatches of song, were

heard on every side from the busy workers, which expressed the full joy of their hearts, already reveling in anticipation of *festas* and banquets without end; for how could it be otherwise, since Nemesius, the great captain, their lord and master, would once more inhabit his villa on the Aventine?

And so the pleasure-loving, light-hearted domestic slaves at the villa looked for their master's arrival as to a period which would put an end to the dull constraint of their lives—all except Zilla, on whose heart their gayety smote with something akin to pain. "Will he come," she asked herself—remembering her last interview with him a *lustrum* ago—"where every object, this child most of all, will recall bitter memories of his loss? And, should he come, will he bear to listen to what I have to tell him? Oh, my forsaken lamb! how cruel have the Fates been to thee, leaving only a poor slave to love and cherish thee!" Then a burst of tears relieved her faithful heart.

Notwithstanding her doubts, which she wisely kept to herself, she arrayed little Claudia every day in daintiest attire, and carefully arranged her long, loose ringlets under a narrow, jewelled fillet, so that they fell over her dimpled white shoulders like a mass of spun gold, thinking if he should come at an unexpected moment he would see her at her best, and be struck by her resemblance to her dead mother; for the same

hair, the same dimpled chin, the same pretty, graceful way of moving her head, the same winning expression, lived again in the child's appearance, manner, and countenance. She bore her mother's name, no instructions having been given as to what she should be called; in fact, she was, apparently, as if dead to her father, and would have been nameless had not her nurse taken it on herself to call her Claudia.

Not only this, but when the little creature began to understand, the good Zilla told her of her brave father, who was in foreign lands fighting for the glory of Rome; she told her how handsome and noble he was, and how tender a nature he had toward those he loved, and how distinguished and honored he was by the Emperor and the Senate, and how idolized by the army. All this was imparted, little by little, to the child as her intelligence developed, until her heart began to long for him, and in her dreams she heard his voice speaking tender, loving words to her, and felt his arms about her, while she reposed her head on his breast. And she would relate her dreams to Zilla as soon as she awoke, and prattle gayly of how she would lead him out to listen to the finches and nightingales, and show him the cascade where the naiads sported, and the grottoes where the fauns hid from the heat of the sun. And the woman listened, agreeing to all she said, and not sparing her caresses. "He shall find that she loves him,

the child he has never seen, and cast off, giving himself no trouble to know whether she be living or dead—a child that the gods themselves might be proud of, and so beautiful that I wonder sometimes if she is mortal. Now, that he has got back from the foreign wars, we'll see what he will do. I have told her he's in Rome, and if he makes no sign, may the infernal gods wreak vengeance on his unnatural heart!" were the thoughts that passed through Zilla's mind.

But day after day passed, and Nemesius did not appear, and at last a message came from him to Symphronius to close the villa as before, an order which was obeyed with low grumblings of discontent and sobs of disappointment from the servants, whose bright dreams were so rudely dispelled. Zilla could not find heart to tell the expectant child the sad news, but made up the most plausible excuses to explain the cause of her disappointment, every word of which the little creature believed.

"He'll be here to-day, I know," Claudia said every morning when she woke; then in the evening: "He'll be sure to come to-morrow, won't he?"

"Yes, my child, to-morrow," Zilla would answer, with a tender caress, while in her heart she whispered: "it takes long to find to-morrow!"

By and by the flush of hope and expectation began to fade out of the little maid's face; a new and nameless sensation in her breast, that she

could not define, but which meant grief all the same, caused her to droop, and her sweet nature became ruffled by the first fretfulness she had ever known. Sometimes Zilla diverted her mind by telling her fables of her own sunny Southern land; sometimes they went to the dove-cotes to feed the doves, whose cooing and fluttering amused the child, as one and another lit upon her shoulders, her head, or her outstretched hand, fanning her with their soft white wings, as she sprinkled grain for them; then another day to the cascade, anywhere, everywhere, to divert her thoughts from the hope which was so long deferred that it made her heart-sick.

A day came, however, when the pretexts of the devoted slave availed no longer; for the little Claudiá, with an upflash of the proud Roman spirit that was in her, ordered her to take her to Rome. "*I will go!*" she said, with imperative gesture; "if he can not come to me, I will be taken to him. If thou wilt not, I'll kill myself!"

"Oh, my little lady!" said Zilla, taken by surprise, yet on guard, "he is not there; the Emperor has sent him off with his legions to quell some revolt. The news reached me only to-day, and I feared to give thee pain by telling thee." It was a plain, unvarnished lie, but Zilla, pagan that she was, would have given her life to save a single tear to this, the only thing left her on earth to love. It was a dogma of paganism that the end sanctified the means.



"When he gets back wilt thou take me to him, if the Emperor can't spare him long enough to come here? Oh, I know the Emperor would let him come, if he only knew he had a poor little girl here whom he has never seen! Wilt thou promise to take me, Zilla?" she sobbed.

"Yes, my beautiful one! I promise," the nurse replied, as she drew her gently to her breast, smoothing the golden hair, and dropping soft kisses and tears on her head. "If the Emperor can spare him, I know he will be here; if he can't, I promise to take thee to him."

That was a hit nearer the truth than Zilla knew when she uttered the chance words, "If the Emperor can spare him;" for it was Valerian's pleasure to have him in constant attendance upon himself, not only in his coarse amusements and his debaucheries, which the finer nature of Nemesius despised, but in all his deliberations and secret matters, in which he confided to his favorite the intelligence brought by spies of threatened conspiracies and other evils that menaced the imperial power. There was no mercy, and but short shrift, for conspirators or suspected traitors in those days; even the completest innocence was no safeguard, if it formed an obstacle to the attainment of an object coveted by those in power. What had imperial Rome to fear? Was she not mistress of the world? As for foreign foes, was not her power sufficient to lay them in the dust? And, as far as her sword could reach, she had nothing to dread.

But there was a mysterious agency, which had been at work ever since the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, that threatened the downfall and destruction of her vaunted indivisible power. Even before the Cæsars, the Sybils had foretold it; and the mysterious words of oracles and augurs, and certain wonderful signs, had left an undertone of dread in all her pæans of triumph, which neither violence nor time could silence,—a dread not of destruction by the sword, but by a supreme system of sorcery and magic wrought by the Nazarene, Christus of Judea, who, having claimed to be a God, was ignominiously executed on the Cross by order of the Roman Procurator Pontius Pilate; but, having by His own power raised Himself from the dead, was with His followers seeking to establish His reign upon earth. It was whispered that the gods would fall before Him; and for a sign, did not His followers despise, deride and insult them? They had been, since the first existence of their sect, vile plotters and conspirators against the Roman Empire and its divinities, and neither fire, sword, the wild beasts in the arena, torture, nor death under its most cruel aspects, had availed to extirpate them; for where one was slaughtered, a hundred seemed to spring out of the earth to take his place. Neither could they be induced at any time, by promises of honors, riches, life, and safety, to cast even a grain of incense into the censers in honor of the gods. Under the Cæsars, under the Republic,

under the emperors from Tiberius to Valerian, the earth had smoked with their blood; hecatombs of the accursed class had been slaughtered; but still they were like the sands of the sea, and they continued to practise their unholy rites in secret, worshipping an ass's head, and sacrificing young infants on their altars, while they blasphemed the gods of Rome and their august worship.

That is how the "heathen raged," and what they believed; it was the way they had talked and believed ever since the Son of God had died upon the Cross for the salvation of the world; and when the proud Roman saw how his power was baffled and set at naught by them—that there was something deathless in their faith and purpose—that they won adherents on every side, and instead of perishing flourished, and like eagles renewed their strength under those fierce persecutions, when every cruel invention of torture and death, that the devilish ingenuity of the pagan mind could devise was brought into play for their extermination—is it strange he should have believed that the Christians dealt in sorcery, and had aid from the spirits of Tartarus to undermine the tremendous system founded by Numa, and disintegrate and bring to nothingness that proud and august Empire established by the Cæsars, and increasing in power under the emperors, in order to elevate to the imperial throne that "King of the Jews," whose kingdom, they

boasted, should extend over the whole earth? And that which was most intolerant and exasperating to the jealous, arrogant Roman mind, was the sense of being almost as much eluded and baffled by those whom they sought to destroy, as if they contended with phantoms.

There was sometimes a surcease of persecution against the Christians, as when by chance a good emperor—too good for his times, and *therefore short-lived*—was elevated to the purple; or when rival emperors were busy killing one another, each trying to win senate and army to his own side; or when foreign wars pressed closely upon their borders, requiring quick and active measures to rout and destroy the audacious foe; in intervals like these the suffering Church had brief quiet. It can not be said that the persecutions ever entirely ceased, for sometimes while their fury relaxed in one quarter it raged in another; but the tree of life still flourished in deathless vigor, bearing countless palms for those who bore witness with their blood for Christ.

There had been one of those brief intervals of relief in Rome, and it was hoped that the new Emperor, flushed with victory, and but recently elevated to the imperial throne, would not sully his triumphs by renewing the persecution of the Christians, among whom were numbers of his most loyal and faithful servants, who—their faith unknown to him—in the council-chamber, the field, and the executive departments of his Gov-

ernment, had rendered him signal and true service. For a while the triumphs and other splendid pageantries amused the public mind; but the gladiatorial contests were now over, people wearied of chariot-races and sham battles in the Colosseum. The shows, where wild beasts of the desert were pitted against human wild beasts still more ferocious in the arena, and fought until they rent each other to pieces; the tragedies, the plays and other public amusements, no longer excited interest: the people were longing for something more exhilarating; while the thousands of soldiers just back from the foreign wars, who now lay encamped without the city—hundreds of whom represented the barbaric peoples that had been subjugated by the Roman eagles—began to murmur and growl, no longer disposed to tolerate anything that did not stir their bloodthirsty and cruel instincts, to gratify which, for want of something better, they began to kill one another in fierce quarrels and brawls. This was a serious matter, which, once started, there was no telling where or how it might end; for their captains, who knew them and their ways, especially in seasons of inactivity, felt assured that while they might be momentarily awed into subordination by having their ringleaders bowstrung, or otherwise killed, their rage would only smoulder, and at last break out with more desperate violence. It was evident that a remedy for this state of affairs was needed; for her army

was the one power that Rome deferred to, knowing how quickly, in certain moods, it sometimes made and unmade emperors.

A grand review by the Emperor in person was proclaimed; this was followed by a sham battle, which, in some instances, was not altogether sham, the opportunity to draw blood being too good a one to be lost; after this, a competition in athletic exercises for prizes, and trials of skill with the bow, foot-races by the soldiers, and other rude diversions, amused the barbarian host, and, so long as they continued, served as means toward the desired result; besides which the Roman populace, always devoted to spectacular displays, was also kept out of mischief by its eagerness to witness and participate in all that was going on, as far as it might.

While these rude amusements were in progress, tidings of fresh plots and conspiracies, and of strange portents, were brought secretly to the ears of Valerian by the Pontifices—those priests who judged all causes relating to their false religion, regulated the feasts and all the other sacred institutions of their system. The haruspices, augurs, and magicians, each came in turn: the one to tell of omens discovered while preparing the sacrifices, the other of dreams and wonderful apparitions, the last with revelations of the future,—all prophesying the downfall of the Empire and its gods, unless renewed and more vigorous measures should be at once taken

to exterminate the Christians, who were alone the cause of the threatened disasters and ruin. These were followed by the Pontifex Maximus himself, to whom all other priests were subject, a man of great authority and dignity, who gravely and impressively warned the Emperor that the gods themselves had spoken, and, in signs and terms not to be withstood, called upon him to crush their enemies.

The Christians of Rome were being steadily persecuted all the time, although not so violently or cruelly just then as in the near past. Many of them languished in the dungeons of the Mamertine, where they had been cast on false charges; daily some were driven to labor in the quarries, others to be chained to the oar in the galleys, while still others were secretly tortured to death, and their possessions confiscated; but this was not enough: more rigorous measures were called for—they must be destroyed. But where should the first blow fall? was the question. Their dangerous doctrines were not confined to slaves or the rabble: there was no place so elevated, no family so noble or powerful, no office so high, that Christians were not found in or connected with it; the army swarmed with them: it was not a rare thing to find a legion or a cohort composed entirely of them; and it was admitted that none fought more bravely for Rome than they. They were found in the Temple of Justice, in the Forum—lawyers of great note—

and the senate itself was contaminated by their presence. No wonder the "heathen raged," for they had cause to tremble.

And now, to add fuel to the flame, news reached Valerian from Asia that a revolt instigated by the Christians had taken place in one of the richest of his recently-acquired provinces, and that an important citadel in another place, just on the frontier, had been betrayed to the enemy by certain of that hated sect who belonged to the garrison, and were at once put to death by order of the Governor, he having issued a decree that no Christian in the province be allowed to escape torture and such death as the enemies of the gods and Rome deserved.

One who lived in troubled times like these wrote: "When the Tiber overflows its banks, when there's pestilence, war or famine, the cry is heard: 'Away to the lions with the Christians!'" \* As then, so now. The superstitious fears of Valerian, the late news from Asia, and the devil that possessed him, worked him up to the necessary degree of rage to issue a fresh edict of persecution against the Christians. No longer would the hot-blooded populace of Rome and the half-mutinous army clamor for excitements such as their brutal natures craved and hungered for: a feast of blood was in preparation that would satisfy them; and a hoarse murmur filled the air, that sounded like the surf beating against a

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\*Tertullian.



rock-bound coast, and already the terrible words, "The Christians to the lions!" could be distinguished mingling with the tumultuous sounds.

It was understood that no mercy was to be shown in this fierce renewal of the persecution, which, according to their proud boast, would only end when Christianity should be exterminated. The time had again come when the Church would find her only earthly refuge in the catacombs,—when the wheat of God would be ground between the teeth of savage beasts, and His vineyards be soaked with blood.

In the sacred precincts of the very temples—so it was decreed—should the contumacious wretches expiate their crime against the gods; there should they honor them, or perish by tortures equal to their guilt. Especially would the Temple of Mars Gradivus, on the Appian Way, be made the theatre of these spectacles of blood. Dedicated to Mars, its roof was supported by a hundred marble columns, and it was surrounded by palm-trees planted years before by order of the senate, in recognition that all the victories of the Roman arms were derived from that august deity. It was here the ambassadors of hostile nations were received by the Senate in pompous state; here also were held those splendid pageants, when the priests in the glittering vestments of their various orders, and the people in holiday attire, bearing branches and garlands, and chanting pæans, would celebrate with pagan

and idolatrous rites new conquests and triumphs. And now that Rome meant to exterminate her most dangerous foes, they would offer hecatombs to their god of victories, to propitiate his favor for final success. And so they planned immortal victories—not for themselves or their gods, as they thought—but for Christ.

It is not necessary to refer more particularly to this fresh persecution under Valerian, except in so far as it affects those whose touching story is here related, and whose acts and words are taken from the reports of judicial proceedings,—it being obligatory by the Roman law for the officials of the courts to keep minutes of all that passed before the tribunal; and it is from these reports, the written testimony of the pagans themselves, that the Christians, in more quiet times, either by favor or bribery, copied many of the thrilling accounts of the martyrs which have been handed down to us.

Nemesius was a man of noble nature, and of principles so elevated that not even the wide license allowed by the pagan religion and laws tended to corrupt them. As the favorite of Valerian, he was often obliged to witness, and seemed to condone by his presence, much that he loathed as degrading to a true manhood; while the unforgotten sorrow of his life, and the dreadful conflicts of war in which he had been engaged ever since it befell him, had not only made him introspective and grave, but had closed his heart

to all softer impressions. Love and beauty had no power to beguile him, and if sometimes a dream or a strange impulse turned his thoughts to his motherless child at the villa on the Aventine, he sought by every means to banish all further memory of it. Life held no charm for him, no incentive except the honor and glory of Rome. He welcomed the new edict of persecution as presenting an opportunity for his zeal, and he was assigned an important part in the terrible scenes about to open; his courage, his devotion to the gods, and his loyalty to the imperial person, making him safe to trust in the execution of the most secret and important plans. What were the Christians to him but "a crew of conspirators lurking in the dark," to hatch treason and evil to Rome? He thought there might be some excuse in their ignorance for plebeians and slaves to be affected by the sorceries of the pestiferous innovators who sought to overthrow the old established order of things, but none for those—and there were many—whose rank, patrician blood, and education should have prevented their insulting the gods by denying their divinity. Both classes deserved death; but the latter, he thought, should be made a warning and example by the infliction of severer tortures, and deaths of more supreme suffering. And yet Nemesis was not a cruel man: he was only a true pagan, and a soldier whose motto was, "The sharper the fight the sooner the victory."

## CHAPTER III.

## THE SURPRISE.

"LISTEN, my sweet one, to the cascade!" said Zilla. "It is fluttering down over the rocks like a tattered rainbow, chattering with the finches, and doing its best to catch them as they flirt their wings in the spray, and dart off with wild trills that sound like derisive laughter. Even the marble naiad seems merry as the sunshine glistens through the water that is dashing over her; she looks as if she'd like to step out and dance! Oh, it is very beautiful, my child! And, then, the smell of the new roses brought from a far Eastern land! they are just blooming, and the air is full of their fragrance. So rise up now, pretty one; don't lie there, with thy face hidden in the grass, saying no word, when even the butterflies would sing if they could."

The two were once more together in the child's favorite haunt, near the cascade, in the beautiful gardens of the villa on the Aventine; but the little one, silent and drooping, no longer responded to the gladdening influences of the spot. In vain Zilla's entreaty; she made no sign, uttered no word. She had thrown herself upon the grass, her forehead resting on one of

her arms, while, with the other extended, her fingers listlessly toyed with a wild hyacinth they happened to touch. Her fleecy, shining curls strayed loosely over her shoulders, some of their long tendrils coiled like shredded gold among the fragrant grasses. Her tunic, of white Persian muslin shot with silver, falling in diaphanous folds around her, was gently stirred now and then by a passing zephyr, but she herself remained motionless and silent.

"Perhaps," thought Zilla, "she is slumbering. The day is so delicious, the air so languorous with sweet odors, and the sunshine falls so warm out of the blue skies, what wonder if she should have dropped asleep?"

But she was not asleep, and Zilla could not see the warm tears that moistened like precious dew the wild violets against which her face was pressed; whatever it was that held her so silent, she would not disturb it, but wait. While watching, with eyes full of yearning love, the recumbent form, a look of deep trouble clouded Zilla's face. "She is slipping away from me," she murmured; "I no longer satisfy her; she is pining for other love than mine, a love coldly withheld, while mine has been lavished. My little lady," she whispered softly, unable to restrain herself any longer, "art thou awake? Ah! why refuse to speak to thy poor Zilla, who loves thee so?"

The bright head moved; there was a sound,

half sigh, half sob; the hand toying with the wild hyacinth was held up, seized and kissed by the woman.

"Now, dearest one," she said, placing her arm tenderly under the child, lifting her gently until she rested against her bosom; then she saw, with a sharp pang, that she had been weeping. But Zilla seemed not to notice; she only smoothed back the golden tangles from her forehead, and turned herself slightly, so that a current of fresh air drifting by fanned and refreshed the hot, flushed face; then, still without a word, she kissed away very gently the traces left by tears upon it; but her heart was not so calm as her outward seeming: it was burning with the fury of a Pythoness, and cried out in voiceless words: "May Nemesis speedily overtake him who would cause tears to a child like this!"

Then, after a space, the air like golden fragrant wine, the low whisper of leaves, the soft splash of fountains, the mellow fluting of the thrushes among the mulberry trees on the hillside, and the clear, wild trills of the goldfinches in the limes, fell like balms on both troubled hearts, soothing those discordant emotions, which under Roman skies are never of long continuance, until both woman and child were possessed by an indefinable passive sensation, that made the sense of existence delicious, and banished the sorrow and passion which so recently disturbed them.

"Now, my child," began Zilla, "we will go and sit under the ilex trees near the Fountain of Diana, and I will tell thee how once the naiads caught a young satyr, and tried to pull him into the stream."

"No! no! I don't want to hear stupid stories like that!" answered the child, as they walked along a verdant alley.

"Then I'll tell thee about the great *fiesta* I once saw, when the priests of the temples, with music and banners, and a great multitude in gay attire, all singing, carried the statue of Cybele from her sanctuary, to bathe it in the Fountain of Egeria. Oh! it was a grand spectacle!"

"I don't want to hear about it!" interrupted the child, in quiet tones.

"Well, then, here we are, and here too are those cypress-wood boxes that were brought weeks ago."

"Boxes! Tell me of *them*."

"Oh, they are only some rough boxes that arrived three weeks ago! I heard Symphronius say they contained statues, Grecian statues. It may be so: no one has seen them."

"Who sent them?" was the next eager question.

"Thy noble father, dear one." Ah, now did the child's face glow and brighten! Here at least was something that spoke of him, something that she could touch and feel. "Here is one," continued Zilla, "right under the dancing

shadows of the leaves; we will sit upon it and rest."

Claudia laid her hand with a caressing touch on the wood, then, bending down, she kissed the rough case, and pressed her cheek upon it. "Yes, yes, he will come very soon now, Zilla; he will want to know what they have done with his boxes; it is very plain that he will *have* to come," she said, joyously.

"I think so, my child. It is time," answered Zilla, sighing: "Oh! how brightly the light dances on the fountain, while the pomegranate flowers scatter their scarlet leaves in the basin, where they chase each other like elves at play—"

"Zilla, what is light?" interrupted Claudia, her wide-open, dreamy eyes gazing blankly away into the far distance.

"Light!" said Zilla, with a start, while her face grew very white; "light is the smile of the gods, I think."

"Dost thou see it?—tell me what it is like," persisted the child.

"Ah, my little one! I feel it, I smell it in the flowers, taste it in the fruits, hear it in the winds, and when the birds sing, even as thou dost," said Zilla, evasively. She had fondly hoped that this child, blind from her birth, would not discover her misfortune, at least until she was old enough to comprehend and make the best of it; hence it had been her ever-tender



and watchful effort to impress her with the idea—not by words—that she was not different from others. All the little creature's other senses were so acute, and so faithfully was her deprivation supplied by every means that Zilla's deep love for her and her intelligent and refined mind could suggest; with such untiring vigilance did she guard her from learning even accidentally that she was blind, that until this moment she had never given the slightest intimation of an awakened consciousness of the fact that there was in her life a mystery of mingled shadow and blankness which she could not penetrate. Zilla was troubled, and sought to turn the child's thoughts in another direction; she was unprepared for the issue now; she must think it over, and see how best to meet it; she would use every art at her command, however, to put off the evil day as long as she could.

"See, dearest, I have brought my lute with me; shall I sing the peasants' vintage song for thee? Or shall I sing about the fishermen, and how they sail out into the blue sea, chaunting their gay songs, as their boats skim the waves like white birds?"

"Yes—that. But who knows?" she asked.

"The poets, who dream of all they tell. Are not thy dreams sometimes lovely? So are theirs."

"Yes: I love to dream strange, beautiful

things. Sing, my mother," for so the child often called her—"sing the poet's dream."

And with light, musical touches, and in tones sweetly clear and tender, Zilla played and sang her own far-away memories of the beautiful *Ægean* with its mysterious islands, visited by the gods, and where the oracles sometimes declared their demoniacal inspirations in the sacred groves.

Who was Zilla? While she sings, her short story may be told, as far as known. Her father was nobly born and rich. He held the heroic traditions of his country as sacred, and the blood of her old heroes that flowed in his veins was like a smouldering fire, ever inciting him to wrath and revolt against the Roman conquerors. Knowing his powerful influence, the Government of Rome tried to win and conciliate him by the offer of high official honors, which he spurned; magnificent bribes and threats followed, but he was moved by neither, and he was marked as a dangerous subject. At length he incited a widespread rebellion against his Roman masters; and his plans were so well laid, so thoroughly organized and well supplied with warlike implements, that it assumed important proportions, to quell and subdue which called forth extraordinary efforts on the part of the Romans, who were engaged in several distant wars at the time. Finally, after a number of severely contested battles, the Greeks were defeated, and their great leader, whose name has passed into oblivion, was

taken in chains to Rome, and cast into one of the horrible subterranean dungeons of Hippolytus on the Urban Way, from which he was shortly dragged to march with other miserable captives in a triumph decreed by the Senate to the successful general, who, after previous conquests, had subdued the rebellion in Greece. Thrown back, after this humiliation, into his dungeon, he perished miserably, his last moments tortured by the news, imparted with fiendish malignity, that his wife and child, whom he had fondly hoped were in safety among the beautiful hills of Thessaly, had been taken captive, brought to Rome, and sold into slavery. It was true.

On the day they were offered in the slave-market, the noble matron's veil and a portion of her garments torn from her to expose her beauty to buyers, the father-in-law of Nemesius, the Senator Serventes Cæsius, who happened to be passing at the moment, was attracted by the refined classic beauty of the unfortunate lady, whom sorrow and harsh adversity had not robbed of her dignity. He remembered that his wife had recently lost her favorite slave, her personal and confidential attendant, who had turned out to be a Christian, was arrested, tortured, and buried while yet alive, for her contumacy in denying the gods, and confessing Christ with a constancy and courage that kindled to madness the rage of her pagan judge.

"This woman," thought the Senator, surveying the noble captive with critical eyes, "will suit; she is of the finest type of Grecian beauty, and the child is a perfect Psyche." He paid his gold for them, and when, after due preparation, they were presented to their proud mistress, who would tolerate no ill-favored or awkward persons among her attendants, she was in raptures. It was not long before she comprehended that her new slaves were of high birth—the woman accomplished, learned and refined; and, urged by curiosity, she endeavored by every means, gentle and harsh, to ascertain her history; but not even the point of her sharp jewelled stiletto, which drew blood from the wound it made in her attendant's delicate flesh, could force the revelation of the secret she so closely guarded.

"Our name will perish with us," was always the reply, until, finding how hopeless it was to expect any longer the information she hungered for, she yielded the caprice for something new. She could not afford to lose the invaluable services of a slave whose exquisite taste, faithful service, refinement, and beautiful presence, more than fulfilled her most fastidious and exacting requirements. Her own little daughter Claudia—afterwards the wife of Nemesus—had also her caprice. She would have the slave-child Zilla for her own companion and playmate; she insisted on her sharing her studies, music, dancing, and all else; and being the only child, she

was indulged. So they grew to womanhood together, loving each other, and happy only when they were together.

A day came when, stricken by a fatal disease, the proud Roman lady, Claudia's mother, died. A year later the noble Grecian matron, whose secret sorrows had preyed upon the springs of her life until they were exhausted, passed from captivity to freedom. The two motherless girls clung to each other, their affection drawn closer by their sorrow; no effort was made to separate them, and nothing occurred to divide their interests, or break up their mutual dependence upon each other, until Claudia's hand was sought in marriage by Nemesius, who was said to be the first match in Rome. The espousals took place with the understanding that the friends were not to be separated. Zilla, older and more thoughtful than Claudia by a few years, found favor in the eyes of Nemesius, who, perceiving that the loss of such companionship would prove a serious disadvantage to his young wife, assured her that he wished the friendship existing between them to continue as heretofore. She went with them to the villa on the Aventine, and we have seen how faithful and tender and true she was to Claudia, even unto death.

This little digression will explain why Zilla, in language, bearing, and manner, was so superior in every respect to the class to which adverse fate had assigned her.

Seeing that Claudia was pleased, the good nurse played and sang on and on, merry airs, dance music, and comic little songs, that made the child laugh and clap her dimpled hands, and beat her feet softly on the grass; then when, afraid of wearying her, Zilla laid the lute aside, Claudia threw her arms around her neck and kissed her.

"Oh, I know now that he will be here very soon!" she exclaimed. "I dream it like the poet, I feel it like the warm sunlight in my heart."

"Yes, dear one, I am sure of it," said Zilla, returning the sweet caress. "Now we'll gather flowers, and make fresh garlands for *Dii Penates*; he will like that, for he honors the gods."

"Oh, yes—but—how wilt thou find the prettiest?" she asked hesitatingly.

"By smelling and touching them," was Zilla's ready answer. "It is easy to tell a hyacinth from a rose, and a violet from a pomegranate flower, which has no perfume. We'll go nearer the fountain, my love, where the spray will fall upon the garlands as we make them, and keep them fresh."

It did not take Zilla long, in such a wilderness of bloom, to collect an armful of the richest flowers, vines, and leaves of the sweet olive; then the two sat together on a low bank of moss, busy and chattering over their work.

"The blue ones are here to thy left," said

Zilla, guiding the child's hand ; "the white ones just in front, close by the blush roses ; these are the sweet olive leaves, and—"

"How canst thou tell one from the other?" interrupted Claudia. "I know thou hast not told me true!"

"I tell thee true : it is by the touch, the smell, the thorns, that I know them."

"Why can not I, too?"

"Thou wilt do it just as I do when thou art older. Thou hast many things to learn yet. Now here are some carnations smelling like cinnamon—some red, some white ; they will look lovely with the blush roses and almond blossoms, and the orange flowers," answered the unscrupulous Zilla, ready to say anything that would save her darling from a knowledge of the bitter truth. And presently they grew so intent on their work that Claudia no longer cared to talk, and Zilla was glad of silence, to wonder how she should meet the queries evolved from the child's ripening intelligence, which would not much longer allow the concealment of her misfortune. Never having seen, she was as yet unable to comprehend the dark side of her life.

While Zilla was pondering the question, she fancied she heard a footstep, which might be that of one of the gardeners ; but the sound suddenly ceased, and was resumed, as if some one were stealthily approaching. She looked up quickly, but saw no one ; in a few moments she heard a

rustling of leaves, and on casting a keen glance around, thought she discovered a quivering of the ivy vines which covered a screen-work that furnished the background for a statue of Silenus ; another glance, more steady and penetrating, discovered a hand pressing aside the sprays, and through the space so opened were visible a pair of large dark eyes gazing intently towards them. She dropped the garland she was weaving, and, crouching on one knee, threw one arm around the child, and as swift as lightning lifted the other to her head, and drew out from the heavy coil of hair at the back a sharp, gleaming dagger, such as the Roman women in those days of violence had need to carry. "It is one of those accursed Christians, lurking about to watch for an opportunity to steal the child for their midnight sacrifice !" was the thought that flashed through her mind ; "but there will be a struggle unto death first." Her teeth were set, her face rigid with her purpose, and as white as marble in the concentration of her heroic will ; she looked like a tigress ready to spring on the hunter who would rob her of her young.

The intruder, seeing that he was discovered, came from his place of concealment and stood in full view, the bright sunlight upon him revealing every feature. It was Nemesis. His complexion was bronzed, his face lined and grave, and the hair on his temples threaded with white. Zilla uttered a low cry, and pointed to the child,



still busy among the flowers. He lifted his hand for her to be silent; his emotion was too deep for words; his chin quivered and his face grew pallid as he stood gazing upon the image of his lost love. The silence was broken by the child:

"Zilla! some one is here! I am afraid: come to me!" she cried.

"Let her come to me," he said, in low, hoarse tones.

"Yes, yes, dear child, some one is indeed here—he whom thou hast waited for; he stands there, and bids thee come to his embrace," said Zilla, in trembling tones.

Claudia threw back her head, a radiant smile lit up her lovely face; and she sprang up, grasping Zilla's hand to be led to him, so dependent had she always been upon her for guidance; her countenance glowed with joy, but her wide-open eyes turned blankly in another direction from where he stood.

"Where? where?" she exclaimed, dragging at Zilla's hand.

"Here. Come to me; do not be afraid. Let go her hand," he said. "This way, my sweet child. What is the meaning of this?" he suddenly asked Zilla, as the child, while apparently gazing directly at him, went from him. In an instant Zilla was at his side.

"She is blind—blind from her birth!" she said, her countenance grave and stern; "but she is unconscious of her misfortune, and must not be told of it."

For answer he sprang forward, lifted the child in his arms, clasping her to his breast, and raining kisses upon her happy face. He had made a sepulchre of his heart all these years; now suddenly unsealed, the true, tender nature within awoke to new life; the deep fountain of his affection, so long pent up, flowed forth, mingled with an infinite pity and tenderness, towards the innocent and lovely being that claimed it. He called her by the sweetest and most endearing names, covering her with caresses, which she, radiant with happiness, returned with glad smiles and sweet, artless words.

The meeting had been entirely unexpected to the great captain, who had intended to go to his villa and return unseen, to select sites for his Greek statuary. Going towards the spot where the cases were deposited, to see if his orders had been carried out, he heard the sound of a lute, accompanied by a wonderfully sweet voice, which presently ceased; then he heard a woman and child conversing, and he determined to conceal himself, ascertain who they were, and go his way. This was not altogether purposeless, for there was something in his heart that assured him he was near his child—his child whom he had never seen—and, impelled by the irresistible impulse, he, treading softly, passed behind the screen of ivy, and, gazing through, beheld that which has been already described.

“Why was this misfortune concealed from me?” he asked, turning suddenly to Zilla.

Zilla laid her finger on her lip, and raised her hand to arrest his speech; then, in a few brief words, spoken in her own sweet Thessalian tongue, she reminded him of the day he had ordered her from his presence, the day when with aching heart she had gone to his apartment to tell him of it.

"I was mad—mad with grief! I remember what thou recallest, and if thou canst not forgive my cruel neglect, let it comfort thee to know that I can never forgive myself," he answered, in the same language.

"Forgive is a word unknown in the vocabulary of a slave towards her master," she replied, in cold, quiet tones. "The child does not know she is blind. I have never spoken to her, nor allowed others to do so, of her wanting sense. I have guarded her from the remotest conception of her loss, which was not so difficult a task as might appear; for, having been born blind, she is not conscious that she is unlike others. At least I fondly hoped so, until this very day, when suddenly she asked me: 'What is light?' I evaded the question, and beg of thee not to refer to her great deprivation. Her life so far has been very happy—"

"Made so by thee, Zilla.' "

"Her only ungratified happiness, noble sir, has been an almost feverish longing for thy presence," continued the relentless Zilla.

"And so thou didst teach her to love me."

Faithful Zilla! how can I ever repay thy care and tenderness? From this moment thou art free!" he said, with emotion.

"Thou meanest kindly," she answered, in low, even tones, "but I can never be free from the promise I made to her dying mother. I understand thee to mean I am no longer thy slave, but I am hers by the affection I bear her, and by that promise; and unless thou dost compel me by force to leave her, I never will. It would kill me to be separated from her; for remember, noble Nemesis, she is the only thing Fate has spared me to love."

"Thou shalt never leave her by will of mine, I swear it by the altars of the gods!" he said. "She is thine by adoption and such love as only mothers can give their offspring."

While this conversation was going on in the musical Thessalian speech, the child, with one arm around her father's neck, had been busily tracing with her dainty fingers every line of his face, each feature in turn, following the outline of his head and chin, always bringing her hand back like a white fluttering bird, to his eyes, as if to make sure of something. She felt that they were full of great tears, which wet her cheek, close pressed to his, and dropped upon her fingers.

"Why dost thou weep when I am so glad?" she asked, tremulously.

"Aha! my little love! how could I weep, hav-

ing just found thee? What thou mistakest for tears is the spray from the fountain, blown into my face by a zephyr," he answered, smoothing her hair from her forehead that he might scan her wonderful loveliness.

"And thou wilt never leave me again? Oh! how I longed to see thee! but never could unless when I was asleep; then when I awoke thou wert gone! Oh! it was very tiresome to wait so long; but now I have thee, and I will never let thee go!" she said, clinging closer to him.

"Nothing shall separate us again, my dove, not even death," he whispered.

The words, "Not even death," of the brave, handsome pagan, it will be seen later, bore a strange significance to subsequent events in his history.

"Go, Zilla, tell Symphronius that I am here; tell him to prepare a *feſta*. I will follow presently with the child," continued Nemesis.

"Zilla! my Zilla! come kiss me; let me feel thy hand. I love thee too, but *he*—thou knowest how long he has been away!" said the sweet child, fearing that in her new-found happiness the faithful nurse would feel herself neglected.

"Thou canst not love him too much, my child," answered Zilla, caressing the dimpled hand she held, and laughing as she sped away on her errand, leaving the two together.

Nemesis could not weary of gazing on the beautiful face of his little Claudia, listening to

her sweet words, and receiving her tender caresses; while her sightless eyes, looking blankly into his, pervaded his whole being with pain and tenderness indescribable. She told him of her plans and her simple pleasures—her doves, the nightingales, her friends the finches and thrushes,—delighted by the interest he expressed in them all; and then he bore her in his arms from grotto to fountain, through the verdant alleys, and at last to the cascade. Her innocent joy stung him with bitter self-reproach; he was almost overwhelmed as thoughts of the past would come; he longed to be alone to give vent to his emotions, but this was impossible until he gave her back to Zilla's care, and he could only vow reparation. "A *lustrum* ago!" he murmured. "Has it been a dark dream, or have I been mad or turned to stone? And all the while this living, breathing image of my lost love—her child—abandoned, forgotten, almost hated, awaiting me here, and blind—blind! Why did not thy vengeance, great Nemesis, fall upon me? Alas! it has fallen upon me through the innocent."

So did the proud, brave spirit of the great Roman captain, stung by remorse, melted by tenderness and exceeding pity for his little blind daughter, bewail itself.

Happiness once more folded her wings in the villa on the Aventine; the withered garland was removed from her statue in the *atrium*, and replaced by one freshly gathered. Sounds of music

and mirth once more echoed through the beautiful gardens, and there was a feast spread for the slaves of Nemesis, who were bidden to enjoy themselves in honor of the return of the master who had never oppressed them.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A MEETING OF OLD FRIENDS.

EVERY hour that Nemesius could spare from attendance on the Emperor, and the secret duties of the new department to which he had been assigned, he spent at the villa with his little daughter, whose misfortune made her doubly dear to him. He was her willing slave, and suffered her to lead him whithersoever she would. Often, perched upon his shoulder, her arm about his neck, they spent hours wandering from one favorite haunt to another. He felt when they were thus together that an unseen presence attended him, which quickened his pulses with mysterious joy.

The villa was again open as formerly; all its treasures of art and its rich decorations were unveiled; fresh garlands daily crowned the statues of the gods and of the *Dii Penates* throughout the beautiful dwelling. It was all for the little Claudia, although she could not see it; and for her the father's jealous love exacted from his dependents the homage due the mistress of the mansion, a homage ungrudgingly given; for had they not loved and pitied her from her very birth? Musicians were hired, that she might



enjoy their harmonious strains far off or near, as she desired, and many a moonlight dance the gay-hearted slaves were allowed to have by her request. Their merry laughter, mingling with the dance-music of lyres and flutes, delighted her ear with as keen an enjoyment as when she heard the songs of birds, fountains, and rustling leaves filling the air with their sweet, exultant notes. Sometimes when on the broad portico with Zilla, listening and laughing as the echoes of the music and voices drifted by, she would dance for very joyousness, her pretty, graceful feet barely touching the mosaic floor, while the moonlight stealing through the vines made the shadows seem to dance with her.

In her father's absence the child clung as of old to Zilla, who, glad in the little one's happiness, felt no jealous pang, although she was anxiously watchful; for with Claudia's quickened intelligence her questions as to visible objects became more difficult to evade, and it was evident that she would ere long discover the mystery of the darkness that shrouded her senses. Apprehensive that this would have a most unhappy effect upon her, Nemesius, as well as the faithful Zilla, was deeply concerned, and sought by every means to guard her from such knowledge. The man's great, tender heart was always moved by an indescribable emotion, which was half torture when she was near him, but when absent, without her sweet, living presence to

consoled, the thought of her misfortune became insupportable. He lavished gold on the most skilled physicians, every altar in Rome smoked with his costly sacrifices, that sight might be given to her eyes ; but the first, hearing that she was born blind, gave him no hope, and the gods he sought to propitiate, no response. He consulted the augurs and magicians ; some of them saw her before making their divinations, but all their unholy arts failed. "Unless the gods give her sight, she, being born blind, must remain so," was what they said. He offered half his fortune to whomsoever would cure her, but none would risk his reputation on uncertain experiments. Thus they proved themselves wise in their generation.

One day, on his way from the Capitoline Hill, near the Temple of Apollo, Nemesius unexpectedly met an old friend—Fabian Cæcilius—whom he was just at that moment thinking of and wishing for, but had not seen for years. They were distantly related, and their friendship, begun in boyhood, continued strong and constant when both reached manhood. Fabian was on the eve of departure from Rome at the time of the nuptials of Nemesius, but delayed going, to be present at the ceremony and the festivities that succeeded. Since that time they had not met, the former having passed the intervening years visiting foreign countries, while the latter, after his great sorrow, had gone with his legion

to seek death on the battle-fields of Gaul. In the loneliness of his present sorrow concerning the little blind Claudia, Nemesius had often wished for his absent friend, who was the only being that had ever enjoyed his entire confidence, and now, when least expected, he had literally run into his arms.

Foreign travel and constant intercourse with men of other lands had made Fabian quite a man of the world and a good-natured cynic. He had dabbled in the various schools of philosophy until his mind had become skeptical of all they taught; and although, being a Roman, he professed himself a firm believer in the polytheistic religion founded by Numa, secretly he had as small faith in that (except as an integral part of the machinery of State) as in the teachings of the philosophers. He still haunted the *Porticîi*, and pored over his favorite authors—Sallust, Lucretius, Sappho, and Homer; was epicurean in his tastes, luxurious in his habits, constant in his friendships, and took pride in feeling himself not so narrow-minded as the rest of mankind. But he had come back to Rome at a moment when it was necessary to draw a veil over such latitudinarian sentiments as his, which made him quite as anxious to find his old confidant, for the purpose of safely relieving his mind, as Nemesius had been to meet him. His character, as we see, was a medley of a quick sort of intelligence without depth,

of frivolity, good perceptive faculties, and an inordinate curiosity; and nothing delighted him more than stirring events, provided they did not interrupt the soft, sensuous routine of his own daily life.

"I was in Cyprus," he said, as he and his friend—two stately patrician figures—walked slowly along, "when I learned that the Christians were having a furious time of it between the wild beasts and other disagreeable methods of torture and death: and, having large possessions here, I thought it would be as well, in view of the numerous confiscations that were going on, to return and demonstrate my fidelity to the gods and the Empire, both of which that singular people defy, and consequently have to suffer the penalty."

"And justly," said Nemesisius, gravely.

"To satisfy my philosophic curiosity," he continued, without reference to the remark of his friend, "I went into the Flavian Amphitheatre\* the other day, to observe the relative courage of the Christians and the tigers, and the result was in favor of the first, *per Fidius!* for their courage was intelligent, their motive—as they view it—worth dying for, while that of the beasts was mere savage instinct. Is it not a most strange delusion for such brave men to give themselves to, thereby robbing the Empire of splendid soldiers? Why, such courage exercised

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\* Known later as the Coliseum.

against the enemies of Rome would soon vanquish them, and triumphantly end her wars. A more glorious age than that of Augustus would be revived—”

“Thou art a dreamer yet, I find. When wilt thou go again to see the enemies of the gods destroyed?”

“The public games,” he replied, with a light laugh, “and the chariot-races at the Circus Maximus, without any admixture of the new spectacular attractions, will satisfy me hereafter.”

The fact is, that while the philosophic curiosity of Fabian Cæcilius had been more than gratified by the cruel spectacle he had lately witnessed in the Flavian Amphitheatre, his sensitive nerves had been so disgusted by the evil smells of the place, the yells of the brutal plebeian element of the assemblage of about one hundred thousand spectators collected there to witness it; by the sight of torn flesh, of spurting blood; by the crunching of human bones in the jaws of lions and tigers, and their low, fiendish growls over their banquet, that he had sworn never to visit it again except for grave reasons. He had hurried from the scene, and gone direct to the Baths of Sallust to refresh himself; then returned to his luxurious abode, where, sheltered from the sun’s glare and heat, shut in from all hideous sounds, and reposing amidst flowers, he sipped his snow-cooled wine, and lost himself in the poems of Lucretius.

But Fabian kept all this to himself, and went on to tell Nemesisius of the wild chase he had been in, ever since his arrival in Rome, to find him; but he was either in attendance on the Emperor, or engaged in the execution of certain secret instructions confided to him, or outside the city walls to ascertain the truth of reports that had reached the imperial ear of a mutinous outbreak among his soldiers. "And this very morning I left a note at the office of thy notary," continued Fabian, "telling thee that I was in Rome, and making the vainest efforts to find thee, asking as a great favor that thou wouldst designate a meeting place either at thy villa or my palace. Then I promised gold to the messenger to whom my note was given if he brought me a reply; if his errand should prove bootless, I promised to kill him; after which I sauntered up to the Capitoline, where I found thee. Come, here we are at my door; come in and dine with me; I have a good cook, and my wines are of the best."

"I would gladly, for I have many things to talk over with thee; but I am on my way to the Forum Vespasian, to see one on important public business. This evening I go to my villa, where I shall spend the night, and it will make me happy if thou wilt accompany me," said Nemesisius, holding out his hand, with one of his rare smiles, which but few could resist. "Say, shall I call for thee?"

"Nothing could be more delightful, since I can not have thy company now; I accept thy invitation with pleasure," answered Fabian, as they clasped hands and separated.

The late afternoon was waning behind a misty veil of gold, which filled the atmosphere with a tender, transparent light, and cast a dreamy charm over imperial Rome and the distant spaces beyond her walls. The air was full of fragrance from countless flowers; innumerable fountains sparkled and made low music as they tossed their spray on the breeze; and it was difficult to realize that under all this outward beauty there were loathsome underground dungeons and horrible prisons, crowded with human beings guiltless of wrong, delicate, nobly-born women, brave men, who had served their country in the field, and in the Senate; faithful, courageous beings of heroic worth from other ranks of life—all enduring the most merciless cruelties that an infernal ingenuity could invent; whose bones were rent, whose flesh was torn and burnt on their quivering bodies, and who were tortured unto death for the faith that was in them. Yes, all this was going on near the costly marble palaces, near the Temples of Justice. But what heeded mighty Rome such sufferings as these, when her only care was to exterminate not only the captives on whom they were inflicted, but all others of their belief?

On this lovely, late, golden afternoon, Neme-

sius and Fabian Cæcilius, in a handsome chariot, were driving towards the Aventine.

"The gods," said Nemesius, as they turned into the winding road-way which led up the Aventine Hill—"the gods have been propitious in giving me the boon of thy companionship once more. I have much to unbosom to thee, my friend, which would remain sealed to all but thee; for thou knowest I do not wear my heart on my toga to be pecked at by crows."

"No more glad than I, my Nemesius, to be with thee, to hear thy voice, and what thou hast been about for more than a *lustrum*. Fame has been busy with thy deeds, and I have heard part, but not all," replied Fabian, wrapping his toga closer as a fresh breeze from the Tiber swept past; "but it will be all the pleasanter heard from thy own lips."

They reached the villa just as the last roseate tints were fading in the western sky, and the new crescent moon and her bright attendant star hung suspended in the soft glow.

"Ah—h!" said Fabian, inhaling a long breath of the delicious air, sweet with the aroma of cedars and limes, "there is no smell of blood in this atmosphere, as below there. How beautiful these gardens! It is like a dream of the Golden Age, and I shall not be surprised to see Philomel and Baucis emerge from yonder grove to invite me to a feast of milk and honey."

"There is one who will give thee better wel-



come," said Nemesisus, laughing, as Claudia, holding Zilla's hand, danced across the portico, her face dimpled with smiles, and her arms now outstretched to embrace him, then to be lifted in his strong arms for the usual kiss and caress.

"*Per Fidius!* that is by all odds the loveliest little nymph I ever beheld!" exclaimed Fabian. "Such grace! such eyes! and hair like gold! Whose is she, Nemesisus?"

"That is my only child—blind from her birth—be careful not to refer to it in speaking with her," answered Nemesisus, with emotion. "She does not know—she is not conscious of her misfortune."

By this time they had alighted; the next moment Claudia was in her father's arms, clinging to him, while he showered soft kisses on her face, and her dimpled fingers ran lovingly and with dainty touches over his features. Their greeting over, Nemesisus signed to his friend to approach, saying:

"My little Claudia, I have a guest with me, my kinsman, Fabian Cæcilius, who has just returned to Rome after a long absence; wilt thou not give him welcome?"

For her father's sake she gave his friend gracious welcome; while he, his kindly nature full of pity for one so beautiful and so unfortunate, spoke to her in low, gentle tones, quite winning her favor with his honeyed words. It was another discord to this Sybarite to find this fresh

contradiction in Nature; why had she been so prodigal in beautiful gifts to this little maid, and yet withheld that sense which left her life in darkness? It seemed like a frightful caprice to his sensuous mind; he did not approve of such an unequal distribution, and arraigned Nature for marring her own perfect work.

After a delightfully spent evening, Nemesisius and his friend sat talking far into the night. They could scarcely discern each other's face; for the alabaster lamp, burning faintly in a distant recess, sufficed only to dispel the shadows around the spot. Except in a silence and shadowy dimness like this, the great captain could not have unveiled the hidden sorrows of his life, even to one loved and trusted like his kinsman.

For the first time since its sudden eclipse, Nemesisius spoke of his brief dream of happiness, of his indifference to his fate, and his flight into Gaul to seek death at the head of his legion. He spared not himself in reference to his neglect of his child, whom he had refused even to look on before his departure; and described how, by accident, he first beheld her on the day he came to the villa to select sites for his Greek statues, and saw in her the perfect image of her mother; and how his heart, vanquished by remorse and affection, had turned relentless against himself for his long and cruel neglect. He told how the bitterness of it all was increased tenfold by discovering that the little one was blind—blind from her

birth ; and that taught to love him by her nurse, who had been as a tender mother to her, she had been waiting and longing for him, unconscious of his want of love for her.

Fabian listened with sympathetic ear. It was the most touching story, taken altogether, he had ever heard ; it was equal to one of the emotional epics of Simonides ; there was nothing coarse, nothing plebeian, nothing revolting in it ; and the fact of the child's blindness being a mystery to herself was a climax of the most refined tragedy. Of course, these were his mental reflections ; but it must not be imagined that because he indulged in them his sympathy was any the less sincere. It was his nature.

Then Nemesius related the unsparing efforts that had been attempted to give sight to his little Claudia, and how all had failed ; and how the hoplessness of her case had grown to be the crowning sorrow of his life.

"I think," said Fabian, several minutes after Nemesius had ceased speaking—"I think I can hold out a hope to thee, my friend. One should never despond. I know a learned man who cures all manner of diseases. He has spent much of his life in the East, where the science of healing is far in advance of anything we know—but—I doubt if thou wouldst care to see him."

"Doubt ! I would go to Avernus, to seek him in its darkest caverns, were he there, had I a hope that his skill could give sight to my child !" exclaimed Nemesius.

"But—he's a Jew."

"Is that all?" said the other, quietly.

"I thought the Jews were proscribed equally with the followers of the Christ. It might not be well for thee to have dealings with him."

"Where is this man?"

"He has a den between the Theatre of Marcellus and the Tiber, in a long, low building that's ready to tumble to ruins; it used to be a stable ages ago, but it is inhabited now by gladiators, athletes, and the like. It is not a safe place to show one's self in."

"Where didst thou first meet him? It must have been a strange adventure to have thrown thee and one of his class together."

"It was, my Nemesis; the acquaintance was involuntary on my part, believe me. I was on my way from Cyprus in a vessel crowded with a motley throng of filthy soldiers, many of them wounded, most of them ill; there were a number of prisoners, whose condition did not make the air especially fragrant; and also a crowd of traders from the East. *Per Fidius!* I was nearly stifled—"

"I can imagine the effect on one of such epicurean tastes as thine; but why embark in such company?" laughed Nemesis.

"It was the only vessel that would leave for Brundisium for weeks. I embarked at night, and was sound asleep when the other passengers came aboard; and when I awoke, we were at

sea, too far from land for me to do anything but try to bear the disgusting situation like a Stoic, the principles of whose philosophy I had some acquaintance with, and had found most convenient under certain circumstances. But those foul smells, and the pestilential air, proved too much for me, and, despite my resistance, I fell ill of a fever, and must have died, had not the Jew physician I have spoken of, who was a passenger, taken my case in hand, and saved my life. He knew nothing of me; I was unconscious, and all that he did was out of a noble and generous humanity. We landed at Brundisium, and, being too feeble to continue my journey, he took me to a house among the mountains, which belonged to a countryman of his, where we remained until I got well and strong; then he accompanied me to Rome, where he had business, and is under my protection so long as I can give it to him."

"I would he were not of that race who, like the Christians, also despise the gods, and are forever plotting against the Empire to avenge the subjugation of Judea. Many believe they are leagued together—Christians and Jews—for they worship the same God," said Nemesius.

"They hate each other, notwithstanding, far too bitterly to enter into any mutual compact for any purpose; and it strikes me that it would save the State a vast deal of trouble, if an edict were issued to compel them to fight it out between them to the extermination of one or the other, in

which case the remnant left could be quickly disposed of," said the pagan noble, laughing lightly. "But I tell thee, my Nemesis," he added, more gravely, as he ran his fingers through his curling, perfumed hair—"under the rose be it said—these 'persecutions,' as they are called, serve no good end that I can see. I have studied the question since the first one under Nero, and, *per Fidius!* the same result has followed every one: the Christians are not exterminated, although hundreds of thousands of them have been put to death every time; and when it is thought that there's an end of them, by Hecate! they swarm out of the very bowels of the earth, and other hiding-places, as if for every one slain ten arise in all the vigor of life, and as strong and defiant in their faith, and as ready to die for it, as those who preceded them. One would suppose the wretches to be immortal! My father, as thou knowest, was keeper of the criminal records; and out of curiosity, I learned many remarkable things concerning the Christians, which made me think it would be just as well to let them alone. The gods, who are powerful, do not take vengeance on them: why should mortals? I tell thee that these ages of blood only serve to imbrute the mind of a people; they prepare the *pabulum* which nourishes anarchists and tyrants—"

"Art sure the fever has entirely left thy brain, Fabian? for it seems to me thy sentiments are not such as a true and loyal Roman should utter,"

interrupted Nemesius, frowning at language which was offensive to him as a faithful subject and soldier of the Empire, and to his firm belief in his polytheistic creed. "Let us quit this subject for the present, and tell me more of thy Jew."

"Pardon me, Nemesius! Foreign travel has a tendency to enlarge one's ideas, and shake one's narrow prejudices. I only deal with the results of facts I have observed, but I will not yield even to thee in my devotion to the Empire and the gods. Now for the Jew. I have told thee all I know about him, except his name, which is Eleazer ben Asa.\* My faith in him is the result of his skill, of which I am the living proof. As to the rest, he's a venerable-looking man, has a noble face, and his hair is white; he may be one of those Judean princes who have been driven into exile by the fortunes of war. Wouldst thou see him?"

"I would, but how? He would be a marked man if messenger of mine were known to inquire for him."

"I think there'd be bones broken, or murder, should any be found seeking him," said Fabian; "for those savages among whom he lives are his sworn friends. He heals them when they come slashed and with broken bones from the arena; and he cures their women and children—for these

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\* Eleazer—God his helper; Asa—physician: a meaning of the name all unknown to Fabian Cæcilius.

brutes have such relations. But I have thought of a plan. I brought home some rare wines. I will send some samples to thee by the Jew, in the character of a wine-merchant."

"An admirable plan! But when, how soon?" exclaimed Nemesius.

"It grieves me to be unable to say with any certainty," replied Fabian. "He comes occasionally to examine my pulse, fearing my fever may return; for it is, he says, periodic as well as pestilential, and requires looking after, as it is months before it gets out of one's system. It would not be safe for him or myself, should I venture into that quarter in which he lives; but I will detain him when he appears again. Let me think—yes, it was four days ago he visited me; he may come to-morrow, or it may be later; but he's sure to come."

"I feel a strange hope springing up in my heart; something whispers that my little blind daughter will yet see," said Nemesius, joyfully. "I will take Symphronius into my confidence, so far as to say that I expect a wine-merchant with samples for my selection, for whom he must be on the look-out, and entertain until I return, should I happen to be absent. What didst thou say he is called?"

"Eleazer ben Asa. Then thou wilt give him safe conduct hence, Nemesius?"

This question startled Nemesius, and he hesitated. His sensitive, loyal nature questioned for



an instant the propriety of holding an interview, for his own selfish ends, with one of a proscribed class, who were known as the enemies of Rome and the gods; but, conscious of his firm integrity and devotion to both, he silenced the doubt, and emphatically gave the required promise. Yes, he would dare much, he would suffer all things, to have the darkened eyes of his child opened to the light. Notwithstanding his frequent disappointments, he seemed, like Antæus, only to draw fresh strength from each defeat. The Jew should not only have safe conduct from the villa, but, if he wrought the desired miracle, he should have unlimited gold, and safe exit from Rome itself. Only for her to see—he would give his life for that!

Night was trailing her spangled mantle westward, and there was already a pale opalescent glow in the east, when Nemesis and his guest sought their couches, the flute-notes of the nightingales echoing in tremulous cadences from their bosky haunts in the gardens, and sweet aromas, that rose like incense through the dewy silence, soothing them to slumber and dreams of peace.

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## CHAPTER V.

WHILE HIS VICTIMS WIN PALMS, VALERIAN  
PLANS A COMEDY.

STIRRING events were daily taking place in Rome, and Nemeseius, owing to the peculiar nature of his duties, was incessantly occupied. It was rarely now that he was able to go to his villa on the Aventine to spend even a portion of the day; and he was obliged to content his longing heart with sending sweet messages to his little blind Claudia, accompanied with delicious confections; sometimes he sent her flowers, and rare fruits from Sicily, and later a singing-bird brought from foreign parts, to let her know how constantly she was in his thoughts.

The persecution increased in violence; already the Christian churches had been levelled to the ground, or given over to base and idolatrous purposes. The vigilance and energy of the pagan detectives were worthy of a better cause. Recently they had discovered that a noble Senator (who stood high in the esteem of the Emperor) and his wife were Christians; also a wealthy widow of patrician blood; one of Rome's bravest generals; a rich prefect, and a young lad of seventeen years, the son of a Consul; and it was

rumored—but whispered under the breath—that certain officers of the Prætorian Guard were suspected; though it was deemed expedient in the latter case to be cautious, and take no action until definite proof could be shown; for it was well known to those in power what the Prætorian Guard were capable of doing if roused, and it was remembered what they had done in the past.

Of these fresh victims some were thrown into the lowest dungeons of the Mamertine, to await torture and death; two were cast to the tigers in the Flavian Amphitheatre; and the Consul's son, who was arrested in the act of tearing down an edict of the Emperor commanding a more rigorous persecution of the Christians, was bound and sewed up in a raw hide, then tossed to hungry, ferocious dogs, who tore him until the exulting strains he sang of Christ the Lord were silent in death—silent to mortal ears, but more vibrant and joyful as he passed the dark portal to the full glory of his eternal reward.

Nemesius was a man whose natural instincts were humane and generous, whose quick impulse was always on the side of the defenceless, who was ever ready, with a fine, magnanimous sort of scorn, to forgive the erring. Constant in his affections, he would yet have sacrificed his own child had his stern sense of duty demanded it. He was simply a noble pagan, ignorant of the ethics of Christian philosophy. Some of those Christians the order for whose arrest he was

compelled to write had been his most valued friends, the nobility of whose character he had venerated and set as a model for his own imitation; others were beautiful, high-born ladies, as virtuous as Octavia, as gentle and devoted as Cornelia, whom he had frequently conversed with, and always admired; but, having embraced the new delusion, and denied the gods, it was beyond his power to help them, and there was nothing left for them but to suffer the penalty they so obstinately courted.

The pang Nemesis felt in being the instrument of their arrest, knowing that they would be tortured with every indignity, and made to suffer in ways that chilled his blood to think of, can be more easily imagined than described; but he tried to steel himself against the pleadings of humanity, and rise above it, by the consideration that as enemies of Rome and the gods, it was just they should perish. This thought quenched all softer emotions, and when he was compelled to attend the Emperor on occasions when the latter desired to glut his cruel soul by witnessing the sufferings of certain Christians against whom he had special hate, the noble soldier's whole being would be so stirred by a passion of mingled fury and pity that he could scarcely control himself—of fury at the obstinate and defiant constancy of the Christian victims, and of pity for their fate, when so little would have saved them.

Nemesius was but following the ideas in which he had been educated, as Saul of Tarsus had done at an earlier date, who in slaying the followers of the Crucified thought he was doing God service, until that wonderful vision near Damascus, when the thunder, the lightning, and the Voice rent the veil of darkness from his soul; and who later, after a glorious apostolate in this very Rome, was beheaded on yonder hill for the love of Him whom he had persecuted.

Scenes of bloodshed and cruelty are sickening even in the shambles, but when human beings—even the enemies of their country, who have sought the destruction of its government, its religion and laws—are sacrificed with an insatiate and relentless fury, in which nothing is spared that can aggravate the merciless horrors of their fate, nature revolts, and although, from a false standpoint, none may gainsay the justice of their punishment, she shrinks, and would, if she might, veil her eyes from the spectacle.

And thus it was, whenever he could do so, that Nemesius avoided these scenes of horror; for he had in the highest degree the true instincts of a brave soldier, not those of an executioner. It can be easily imagined what an indescribable relief it was to him when, by a brief cessation of his uncongenial duties, he found time to seek the sweet repose of his villa, and the presence of the precious jewel it contained. To hold his sightless darling in his arms, to feel her sweet breath

upon his cheek, listen to her simple endearments, while she caressed him and related in merry tones all that had happened since his last visit; to feel his heart melting and running over with a tenderness that almost made him weep, was his happiness and recompense. Together they wandered about the beautiful gardens, he ever on the alert to remove the smallest stick or stone that lay in her path, lest her tender feet should be bruised, and press back the overhanging sprays and flowering thorns, to prevent their getting entangled in her shining hair, or wounding by the slightest scratch her delicate flesh.

At table it was the same watchful care that with gentlest touch guided the snow-cooled orange-juice to her lips, selected for her repast the daintiest confections, and the most delicious bits of the birds especially prepared to tempt her appetite. Then would follow her pretence of feeding him, accompanied with gleeful trills of laughter and gladsome words; for she did not yet comprehend the mysterious darkness that veiled the outer world from her. Sometimes she fell asleep in his arms, and lay all unconscious of the slow, heavy tears that dropped from his eyes upon her golden hair. "Why," his heart would cry out in anguish—"why have the gods, whom I have worshipped and served from my youth, dealt me so hard a fate as this? Why are they not propitious, when I spare neither costly sacrifice nor prayers that her eyes may be

opened?" Then he would wonder what had become of Fabian Cæcilius, his kinsman, and the Jew healer, Eleazer ben Asa, from neither of whom he had yet heard.

Thus occupied between his public duties and his almost stolen visits to his child, Nemesius had but little time to devote to social pleasures, or the usual amusements of his class. His old intimates, even Valerian himself, and certain noble beauties of the palace, began to note his absence, and observed, as the weeks and months passed by, that his presence among them became of more rare occurrence. At first they imagined that the exigencies of the imperial service engrossed him; then one and another began to grow unduly curious; then there were whispers in the air, and suggestions professing to furnish a clue to the mystery, which determined some of his good friends to lose no time in finding out what pretty intrigue so absorbed him; "for it will be a good joke," they said among themselves, "to discover that our great captain, the model of patricians, is mortal like ourselves."

Sometimes he was seen in attendance on the Emperor when he went in state to the Circus Maximus to witness the games, the races, or some extraordinary spectacle. On one occasion he was observed with the imperial party at the Flavian Amphitheatre, there by the command of the tyrant he served, who desired to glut the savagery of his own brutal nature, and give the

sanction of his presence to an exceptionally cruel conflict between Numidian lions—fierce, ravening monsters—that were turned half-famished into the arena, and the defenceless Christians doomed to be exposed to their fury, whose pagan jailers derided and taunted them, bidding them call upon their God, of whom they made such boasts, to deliver them from the teeth of the savage beasts. But when the Christians, their countenances shining with exalted joy, entered the arena, chanting a song of deliverance, while the savage throng who gazed down upon them expected to see them suddenly destroyed, the great, gaunt, hungry lions cowered, and, creeping at a distance from them, lay supinely down. In vain all the furious howlings and shouts of the disappointed people; in vain every effort of the keepers to rouse the lions to such rage that they would spring upon and destroy their victims: they lay like whipped hounds, as if afraid to move.

None of that immense crowd was so furious that day as he who wore the purple—Valerian, Emperor of Rome—none so baffled, so mad with brutal passions at the utter failure of a spectacle he had anticipated with the keenest delight; but a swift message from him brought the torturers and executioners on the scene, and when the first had done their work of tearing and rending the quivering flesh of the victims, the latter beheaded them.



"It was nothing wonderful!" the people said; "it was evident the lions had been tampered with, drugged maybe, else they would have torn those wretches to pieces in a trice. It was a disappointment to us, but they got their deserts at last."

Aye! their exceeding great reward, their crowns, their palms, had their blind persecutors but understood the truth.

Nemesius had witnessed the whole terrible spectacle with stern eyes, and, while it sickened his heart, and offended the natural humanity of his nature, he condoned the brutal cruelty of it by the thought, "The enemies of the gods and the Empire must suffer!" This was the shibboleth of his benighted mind. For a space he once more disappeared from the public gaze, until some weeks afterwards one of his friends met him at the Temple of Mars, where they both witnessed a marvellous thing. In fact, so many marvellous things were occurring in relation to the Christians, that the Roman people began to whisper traditions of wonderful events that had taken place in former persecutions, and were almost led to fancy that "the gods were indifferent to their own honor and supremacy, they bore it all so tamely, when it would be such easy work for them to destroy this rebellious sect, who were insulting, and defying them, and threatening the Empire with ruin."

On the day referred to, two of the new sect—

"a sturdy, obstinate, and defiant pair," whose testimony for Christ was like the blast of a trumpet—were commanded to throw spices into a brazier that stood on a tripod before a marble statue of the god who was honored in the Temple. In loud, clear tones they refused to present a single grain in honor of an image of stone. "We know of no God except Him who created the heavens, the earth, and mankind, and His only Son, Jesus Christ, who died for the salvation of the world; in whom dwell all power, majesty, and perfection, and who will bring to naught the gods of stone and brass that ye worship, and will reign over the whole earth."

At a sign from the judge, one of the lictors approached, and struck the speaker a cruel blow on the mouth with an iron implement of torture that lay within reach; and at the moment (the blow almost instantaneously following the words) the statue of the god toppled from its pedestal, and fell with a loud crash to the pavement, shivered to fragments. Some who witnessed the miracle embraced the Christian faith on the spot, and openly declared it; while the rest shouted: "Down with the sorcerers! Let them die!" A few minutes of fiery pain, of crimson agony; a keen, fierce quivering of nerves and flesh, and the soldiers of Christ triumphed over death. Released like birds from the nets of the fowler, their glad souls sped swiftly to the beatific vision of Him of whom they had given testimony sealed with their blood.

mured Nemesis. "Is a  
 ch suffering, such a waste  
 understand it. Can it be  
 for the sake of notoriety?  
 believe that by so dying,  
 vine courage, they win  
 imaginable glory? They  
 they must be acquainted  
 science of magic unknown  
 world, to enable them to do  
 heard of, and some that I  
 confess I should like to pen-

nted Nemesis as he drove  
 that evening, until, leav-  
 led his horses towards the  
 cent of the rough roadway  
 The purer air, the shade  
 sweet thought of the wel-  
 im, and the brief, joyous  
 w, banished from his mind  
 could neither comprehend

visit for many days, and  
 spirits began to droop. She  
 short time, assured that his  
 brief duration; but when  
 her fresh disappointment,  
 to run into weeks, she  
 to faithful Zilla's bosom,  
 she could to comfort her.

*"It would pain  
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 "Hush-sh-sh! My little lad  
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"It would pain him," said the nurse one day, while they were resting in the entrance of a grotto, the warm Roman sun steeping all the beauty and fragrance around in soft splendor—"it would pain him, dear child, to think thou wert fretting. Dost thou not know that a great soldier like the noble Nemesius, the Emperor's favorite, can not get off whenever he would, especially in troublous times like these?"

"But why—why, when I want him?" she sobbed. "The Emperor is a wicked man—"

"Hush-sh-sh! My little lady, the air hath ears and tongue," said Zilla, casting a quick glance around her. "The Emperor shows thy noble father great honor in making him his friend, and wishing to have him near his person. By and by he will make him *General*, and then—"

"And then what?"

"It is nothing, my sweet," answered Zilla. But it was not "nothing," and the woman had only checked herself wisely; for she was going to say: "It is an easy step from that to the imperial dignity, as the history of Rome can show."

"But I want him! The Emperor does not love him half so well as I do," was the fretful answer.

"And now I remember!" continued Zilla, who was prolific in imaginary pretexts on occasions like the present; "the great games are going on at the Circus Maximus, the chariot-races, the

elephants from India; and the gladiators are to fight. Oh! there are to be grand spectacles, and the Emperor, and all the beauty and fashion and splendor of Rome with him, is to be present. Dost thou not see that it would not do for thy noble father Nemesisus to be absent?"

"Oh, I don't care for it all!—I only want him!" she said, fixing her large, dreamy-looking eyes towards the far-distant spaces; then her head drooped on Zilla's shoulder, and she was silent, except when a sigh, which was half a sob, escaped her half-parted lips.

"But the grand shows must be nearly over by this time, and I am sure that we shall see him soon, perhaps this very evening. I know how *he* frets at being kept from thee; and know, too, that if made Emperor to-morrow he would not stay away, could he with honor get off," coaxed Zilla, caressing the beautiful head reposing on her shoulder. "Come now, let us go and feed the doves."

"Yes," she answered, rising, "let us go; he can not help it, I know. But he may come this evening."

And her hope was verified; for ere the sunset roses faded from the gold-fringed west her heart was made glad by his presence.

Notwithstanding Zilla's prettily-woven tissue of possibilities by which she sought to console Claudia's sore heart, Nemesisus was, in fact, seen no more frequently in the gay society of Rome

than before, nor had Fabian Cæcilius yet appeared. A lady of the court, who was a relative of the Emperor, and famed for her beauty, told Nemesius that his kinsman had gone to visit a friend at Ostia, and that his departure was unexpected to himself until an hour before leaving. There was no reason to doubt the news, as Fabian was one of her intimates and admirers; but she could give no particulars as to the why and wherefore of his leaving Rome—a matter of little interest to her, so long as she had at length attracted the attention of Nemesius by a subject of mutual interest; for the beautiful Laodice had long ago vowed to win the great soldier's love, but until now he had persistently evaded her efforts, without meaning to do so, or seeming conscious of her preference.

She had been one of those most interested in the endeavor to discover why Nemesius so seldom appeared at the festivities held at the imperial palace, and other places frequented by the most distinguished and princely families in Rome. She had questioned Fabian, whose quick worldly perceptions read her secret; but he mystified instead of giving her correct intelligence, threw out hints that kindled her jealousy, and made her quite miserable. She discovered, from an emissary whom she secretly employed, that Nemesius spent all his spare time at his villa on the Aventine. What was the attraction? For whom such devotion? Who was her rival? There was

a vague whisper of a beautiful Greek lady who lived at the villa, for whom it had been converted into a place of splendor and enchantments. Slander is as old as sin, and in those far-off times of which we write, even as in our own day, this foul bird chose the fairest, ripest fruit to peck at and feast upon. And so it came to pass that, from various motives—curiosity, envy, and the designs of a silly woman—the untainted reputation of Nemesis was secretly assailed. Some of those who were interested in the affair were inspired by a most ignoble motive, that of discovering something disreputable in a life whose noble purity was a conspicuous contrast and reproach to their own.

Laodice had whispered her surmises to a confidential friend, who, in turn, repeated them to others, until the wonder grew, and finally reached the ears of the Emperor, who was not altogether incredulous, but rather amused by it. If true, the facts would bring his favorite nearer his own base level. But no one had been so bold as to question Nemesis, or so daring as to pry openly into his private affairs. Thus the gossips were left in a state of excited uncertainty, that added piquancy to the mystery which they fancied they had discovered, and were determined to undermine.

One day the Emperor, exulting in the idea that to him would belong the honor of finally exterminating the despised Christians, was in a

gay mood, and disposed to enjoy himself. He was weary of his usual daily amusements; he was satiated for the moment with bloody, cruel spectacles, and craved something novel. "What better," he suddenly thought, "than to go with a select party and surprise Nemesius with his new divinity? I will release him from his duties for three days; on the second day we will go; it will equal the best comedy."

Those whom Valerian informed of his plan, and invited to accompany him, were bound to a secrecy which they were well aware it would not be safe for them to break, except one, Fabian Cæcilius, who had returned from Ostia just in time to be included as an invited guest in the frolic. Risking everything, he found means to convey information to his friend of the honor intended him, that he might have time to order the preparation of a feast which would be not only suitable to the occasion, but creditable to his hospitality; for well did Fabian know that there was nothing at the beautiful villa on the Aventine that would make concealment desirable; at the same time, he could not refrain from giving his kinsman a hint of the object of the visit, the joke was so good.

Nemesius, with a sort of grim humor, gave his orders to the steward Symphronius, and everything was set in motion for the reception of the distinguished guests. The costly and tasteful interior decorations of the villa have



been already described; add to them flowers, light, and music, and it will be easy to imagine the scene.

When the elegant, ivory-panelled chariots, drawn by horses covered with trappings of silken fringe, their harness plated with gold, came sweeping through the great bronze gates up the chestnut avenue, Nemesius in the rich attire of a patrician was on the portico ready to receive his guests.

"We intended giving thee a pleasant surprise," said Valerian, with a frown, as he returned the salutation of his host, assured by the ceremony of his reception that through some babblers the little comedy he had planned was spoilt.

"A most agreeable one, imperial sir! It has been a day of delightful surprise: some old friends from Hellas, whom I have not met for years, have been with me," answered Nemesius, who stated the truth.

"We have left the *Emperor* in Rome: only Valerian is here, for his own private enjoyment," whispered the tyrant, his brow having cleared at the explanation of Nemesius.

It was a brilliant scene, that patrician crowd, standing in groups, or moving through the superb, lofty rooms—the men in their rich attire, the high-born ladies brilliant in all the arts of the toilette. The fair Laodice wore a tunic of pale yellow silk, confined at the waist by a

cincture of precious stones, which fell in deep folds to the floor; loops of spangled gauze gave an airy grace to her costume without detracting from its classic outline, and her beautiful head was crowned with roses fastened to her hair with gold pins; while a necklace of pearls and bracelets of gold adorned her neck and arms.

This was the style of dress which prevailed, but monotony was avoided by a difference in color according to the taste of the wearer; and the effect produced by the blending of rich and delicate tints in endless contrast, combined with the flash of jewels, was extremely brilliant. The soft music of flutes, harps, and flageolets floated sweetly above the hum of conversation and laughter, while a fine spray of perfumed water was by some cunning contrivance diffused in the air.

"Our brave captain has become a Sybarite," said Valerian, with a coarse laugh; then, laying his hand on the statue of an ancestor of Nemesius (who had lived a simple life like Cincinnatus, except when called from his pastoral occupations to win safety or glory for Rome), he added: "Does it ever strike thee, Nemesius, what the thoughts of his shade would be in scenes like this?"

"I have not thought of him, except to be careful not to stain his great memory by act of mine," answered Nemesius, with a grave smile. "His austere mind, now I come to think of it, would

doubtless regard our present mode of living as degeneracy."

"I am thankful that the customs of the times are less severe than in those old days. A people must either learn refinement or remain barbarous," replied Valerian, forgetful for the instant of the barbarous persecution of the unoffending Christians then in progress under his cruel edicts. "I quite envy thee this delicious retreat, Nemesius; it can not be that thou inhabitest it alone: there must be one to brighten thy solitude—at least rumor so informs us,—a divinity who commands the homage of thy heart," added the Emperor, a wicked leer in his eyes, and mockery in every tone of his voice.

The beautiful Laodice and two of her confidential friends had hovered near Nemesius ever since their arrival,—Fabian Cæcilius, with his deferential air and mocking smile, in close attendance on them. Until this moment they had heard no allusion to the object of their curiosity, and now listened with strained ears for the response.

"Yes," replied Nemesius, with that grave, sweet smile that imparted such an indescribable charm to his stern features; "report for once speaks truly: one shares my solitude, who holds my heart and commands its devotion,—one to whom I am bound by the strongest and most tender ties."

The face of Laodice grew white under the

cosmetics by which she had sought to make it more beautiful, until its aspect was ghastly ; her fine eyes flashed, and her pink, almond-shaped finger-nails pierced the soft palm of the hand half hidden by the folds of her robe. What stronger confirmation was needed of the truth of her suspicions than his own very word, so shamelessly uttered? So intently was her attention directed to the Emperor and Nemesius, to catch the least word that might follow, that she did not observe the cynical smile on Fabian's countenance, or the sparkle of mirth in his usually fathomless eyes, as he stood watching her. By a strong effort, however, she mastered her passionate emotion, and her countenance resumed its usual aspect.

What we have taken so long to tell occupied scarcely two seconds ; for Valerian is saying in reply : "The charm of our visit will be incomplete without a glimpse of this divinity. By Eros ! thou hast moved my curiosity beyond bounds to see one who holds our brave Stoic in such thrall."

Then other voices plead ; the gay company, attracted by the animated circle around the Emperor and their host, joined the group, expressing in courtly phrases their desire to offer their homage to the peerless being at whose feet the brave and distinguished soldier had laid his heart and his laurels. Fabian exchanged one quick glance with his friend.

"Wouldst thou see her now, or after the banquet?" asked Nemesius.

"At once. We want no distracting element at the feast," answered Valerian, with a coarse laugh.

"I will bring her," said Nemesius, bowing with stately grace as he turned away. The gay throng made way for him, and watched his noble figure until he disappeared behind a silken curtain that draped an entrance to the private family apartments of the villa.

Some of the noble matrons present began to look severe; Laodice, inwardly raging, wore a slight frown that enhanced her imperious beauty, while she and her two friends interchanged satirical and sneering remarks in relation to the paragon they were so soon to behold. Some faces were eager with curiosity, others were smiling and scornful; there were those who giggled and felt idly indifferent, and a few whose hands were ready to draw aside their garments when she passed; while the young patricians exchanged significant glances, or looked supremely indifferent.

The guests had not long to wait. The rich drapery was again thrown back, and Nemesius reappeared, followed by a woman who led by the hand a lovely child of some seven summers. The woman wore a dark robe; her severely classic face was like Parian marble; her black silken hair, threaded with white, was gathered

in a loose knot at the back of her head, where it was secured by a small jewelled stiletto. Unabashed by the number of eyes that scanned her with questioning glances, she advanced with the mien of a captive queen, leading the child, who, in her white diaphanous tunic sprinkled with woven dots of silver, her girdle of pearls, and her long-flowing golden curls garlanded with violets, was a vision of perfect loveliness and purity. Lifting her in his arms, Nemesius presented her to the Emperor.

"This is she whom thou hast asked to see, my little motherless daughter Claudia. She has been blind from her birth," he added, in a whisper; then aloud, turning towards his expectant guests: "The lady of my love, to whom my life is vowed."

There was no reproach in his tone, and his countenance wore a smile of indescribable tenderness, which none who looked upon it had ever seen there before.

For a brief moment the coarse nature of Valerian shrunk before such angelic innocence; a singular vibration in his corrupt heart asserted an original but almost extinguished instinct of human feeling, and he spoke gently—as gently as his rough voice permitted—to the beautiful child, whose large brown eyes were gazing blankly abroad; then lifting her dimpled hand to his lips, he kissed it, exclaiming as he released it:

"A mate for Cupid, by Fidius! Between them they'll make mankind mad some day. We expected something different from this, my brave Nemesis; we are defrauded of our comedy; but, by the mother of the gods! a divinity like this makes it excusable."

Strange to say, Valerian was secretly pleased to discover that his estimate of his favorite's character was not at fault, and that let the world wag as it might, his Nemesis was Nemesis still.

The eyes of Laodice sparkled with joy and renewed hope; for she imagined that through his affection for his child she would find the most salient point of attack to vanquish and bring him to her feet. All present were more or less touched by the scene they had just witnessed, which so strongly appealed to their warm, emotional natures; every one felt a sentiment of pity for the blind child, and wished to offer little caresses and kind, endearing words. Foremost among them, Laodice approached, and endeavored by sweetest wiles to beguile her from her father's arms to her own; but clinging to his neck, she refused the proffered blandishments. The strange voices, the strange hands that touched her ever so softly, the outflow of strange magnetisms to which her delicate organization was peculiarly sensitive, agitated her; her lips quivered, her heart beat quickly and loud. Nemesis felt her trembling like an aspen leaf; and, fearing that she would be quite

overcome should her stay be prolonged, after a whispered word of explanation to the Emperor, he gave her into the care of Zilla.

The faithful nurse bore the little Claudia away out of the heated, perfumed atmosphere ; out of the villa, down through the gardens, where the fountains sparkled in the last rosy splendors of departing day—on and on, until the cascade was reached, where, resting together on their favorite mossy couch, both remained silent, until the fluting of the nightingales and the silvery sounds of the dancing water brought peace to the child's heart, and tranquillity to her perturbed nerves; then she asked a thousand questions as to the occasion in which she had been so unexpectedly and involuntarily a participant, all of which Zilla answered with her usual tact, and, no doubt, some stretches of the imagination, required by the exigencies of the case.

Meanwhile the banquet was served, to the immense relief of Valerian, who began to feel bored as well as hungry ; he occupied the place of honor, the rest of the company reclining on their couches, according to their rank. A perfumed *mappa* was handed to each guest, who spread it over his breast, and after the removal of the last courses, the snow-cooled wines were brought on—red wine, white wine, black wine, and wine like liquid, transparent gold, and old Falernian ; and for those whose taste fancied them, *mulsum*, a mixture of new wine and



honey, and *caldā*, a drink made of wine, hot water, and spices.

Symphronius, presiding over all the arrangements of the feast, was in his glory; his master's wines were his boast and the pride of his life, and years had passed since such an opportunity as this had presented itself to have them tasted, praised, and envied. While the gold and crystal goblets were being arranged in due order upon the tables, slaves entered, who touched the hair of each guest with nard, which left a delicious perfume; these were followed by others, who bore chaplets of roses, myrtle, ivy, parsley, and violets, with which they crowned those present. Then libations were poured, and the wine was passed.

At this stage the ladies left the table to partake of fruits and confections *al fresco*, their enjoyment heightened by the music of lutes and flageolets by unseen performers, and where, unrestrained by ceremony and the presence of the men, they gave rein to their mirth and their tongues, scandal, ridicule, and gossip ruling the hour.

Symphronius was radiant with exultation; for had he not heard the wines praised without stint even by the Emperor? had he not seen them drunk as only epicures drink? tasted with delight to the last delicious drop, and in moderation, to prolong the pleasure, and preserve the sensitive integrity of the palate? These pure

wines exhilarated the spirits, and called forth sparkles of wit, jest, and merriment; but to have indulged one's self to drunkenness at a Roman banquet like this would have been considered not only an insult to the sacred rite of hospitality, but to one's entertainers,—proving that in some of their social customs these refined pagans might be profitably imitated.

The moon had risen, full-orbed and unclouded, by the time the guests of Nemesius departed from the villa. For a single moment Fabian Cæcilius and himself found an opportunity to exchange a word, the chariot of the Emperor having just driven off.

"What has become of the Jew, Ben Asa?" whispered Nemesius.

"The infernal gods only know! I believe the earth has opened and swallowed him. He has not been in Rome for many months, or I should have seen him," quickly replied Fabian, under his breath, as he hastened to assist the stately Laodice into her chariot.

## CHAPTER VI.

## LIFE IN ROME—ELEAZER BEN ASA.

THE jealous suspicions which had made the beautiful Laodice so unhappy being lulled to rest, she began with fresh zest to exercise her most fascinating wiles to captivate Nemesisius. That he was reputed invulnerable did not deter her in the least, for the fact would only increase her triumph should her efforts to win him be crowned with success; but he, all unconscious of her purpose, received her coquettish advances with such genuine unconcern, and an indifference almost verging on rudeness, that she was sometimes furious, and again discouraged and despondent. If he ever gave her an after-thought, it was a regret that one so beautiful should be lacking in that delicate reserve which above all things enhances a woman's natural attractions. She tried to reach his heart whenever the opportunity offered, by showing a tender interest in his child, by affecting the deepest sympathy for her misfortune and his sorrow, by glowing praise of her loveliness, and oft-repeated entreaties that she should be brought to make her a visit, promising that nothing should be spared to give her happiness; but Nemesisius, knowing exactly what

constituted his little Claudia's happiness, and how ineffectual all efforts would be to give her either pleasure or content separated from himself and the simple joys of her home-life, felt it best to decline what he supposed was a well-meant kindness.

In the egoism of his great love for his blind child, it was no surprise to the fond father to hear Claudia's loveliness admired, and tender, gentle, pitying words spoken of her sad case—for who that once looked upon her could avoid feeling such sentiments?—but the voluptuous beauty of this woman, her languishing airs, the rich perfumes that made the atmosphere heavy around her, the magnificence of her attire, the profusion of her jewels, the half-veiled fire of her dark, handsome eyes, indicated to his keen perceptions not only a vain, shallow nature, but a something indefinable which awakened his distrust, and made him resolve to shield his guileless one from her influence, however kind her intentions might appear.

Many presents of rare fruits and delicious confections, with sweet messages, which could not be declined without offence, found their way from Laodice to the little blind girl at the villa, and at last, self-invited, she came in person to seek a better acquaintance with her, secure from the repulse of a cold reception; for she chose her opportunity for the visit at a time when she knew that Nemesius would be absent on duty, and

there would be no danger of her being surprised by his unexpected appearance,—her plan being to win the affection of his child without offending his austere sense of propriety.

After an absence of several days, Nemesius found himself at liberty to spend an afternoon at his home on the Aventine. The first joyous welcome and fond embraces over, little Claudia, as usual, began to tell him how she had spent her time, and all that had happened during the interval of his absence. The most important events were, of course, the three visits of “the strange lady, who brought me flowers, and said many things to me that sounded kind, and tried to caress me; but I ran from her!”

“Who was the lady?” he asked Zilla; but Zilla, not having heard her name, could only describe her; then he knew, and while a flush of displeasure darkened his face, he only said:

“She is kind to come so far to see such a lonely little one as my Claudia.”

“I am not lonely!” exclaimed the child, with a flush of angry emotion; “and I do not wish her to come again. I hate her! She made me shiver all over when she touched me.”

“I can not forbid her visits, my child,” he said, soothingly. “If she is the one I think, she is not only a beautiful lady, but a relative of the Emperor, against whom it would be rude to close my doors. Do not be unreasonable, little one, when one means only kindness to thee; for my

sake do not show thy aversion, but try to be more amiable should she come again."

"For thy sake?—yes, to please thee I will be more amiable," the child answered, hesitatingly.

The man's heart was troubled within him; he did not wish his child's guileless nature to be ruffled by a knowledge of evil, or her trust in human nature to be rudely disturbed; he had, therefore, suppressed all that he felt, but resolved at the same time to confide such instructions to Zilla and Symphronius as would prevent a continuance of the intercourse which he thought best should cease. Then he tenderly kissed the sweet face pleadingly lifted towards his; he was satisfied that her instinct of aversion would be her best preservative, in case his precautions should fail, and she be again brought in contact with her unwelcome and self-invited guest. But underlying all, there was in his mind a secret premonition of the evil this woman was capable of towards any one who might incur her dislike or thwart her designs, which gave him many an anxious thought in the night of unrest that followed; and although he tried to persuade himself that he was mistaken and judged her unfairly, he resolved to be on his guard. Naturally unsuspecting, his impressions had greater weight, and he found it impossible to shake them off even when the bright golden sunshine of an unclouded sky, streaming through the vines that shaded his window, told him that another day had come.

As time sped on, nearer and more dear became his blind child to the strong, noble heart of Nemesis, until his affection had now grown to be the overmastering sentiment of his being, and she the one object before which all others were dwarfed and unreal. When with her, he allowed no hand but his own to guide and serve her; together, the measure of their content was full; separated, each felt as if something had gone out of his or her life; she was the sunshine, the music, the sweet pain and precious jewel of his existence, and their hearts were knit together by ties stronger than death. He had but one wish, one hope for her and for himself, which haunted him day and night—as well in the deep stillness of the silent hours as through all the turmoil and excitement of his daily life—like a low, persistent threnody attuned to the outcry of his heart: “Oh, that my child could see!”

And he continued to pour out his gold with lavish hand for the renewal of burnt-offerings on the altars of Rome, for special intercessions to his deaf gods, for superstitious rites in the innermost sanctuaries of the temples, by augurs and priests, for mysterious incantations and choral hymns by the Vestals as they circled in solemn measure around the sacred fire upon their shrines,—all, all was done, and the cost not counted, that her blind eyes might be opened; and, although of no avail, his loyal heart did not for a moment distrust the power of

the gods—he only thought that through some fault of his own they had refused to be propitious. What, then, was required to appease their anger? He could not tell; for had he not done everything except sacrifice his own life? And how willing he was to do even that, on the least hope that it would avail, his own heart attested.

Stung by this last disappointment of his hopes, frustrated, and almost despairing, the Jew healer of whom Fabian had told him was for the time forgotten, until one day, awakened by the natural process of reaction from his gloomy despondency, Nemesius suddenly recollected all that he had heard from Fabian about his wonderful skill. Again a glimmer of hope shone as if from afar, yet within reach, and he determined to seek him forthwith, and test his skill. But where was he? Fabian Cæcilius had told him, shortly after the Emperor's visit to the villa, that the Jew had returned to Rome; but since that occasion weeks had elapsed, and he had seen neither one nor the other.

Obeying the impulse, Nemesius went direct to Fabian's palace, and was informed by the porter that his master had been suddenly called to Naples on some urgent affair. Not satisfied with such meagre information, he directed the man to summon the steward, who promptly appeared, bowing obsequiously, and with deprecatory grimace, to learn his will. But when questioned, he



could only repeat the fact as stated by the porter, with the additional information that his master had named no time for his return. Nemesisius was about to leave the house when the words, "But there's a letter, noble sir, perhaps for you," arrested his steps, and, confronting the steward, he said:

"Where is the letter? Fetch it here, that I may see if it is addressed to me."

There was authority in his air and tone, which suggested to the man's dull mind that he had possibly got himself into difficulties by his negligence; and he quickly returned with the mis-sive, which Nemesisius at a glance saw was directed to himself.

"Why was this not sent to me immediately?" he demanded. "The name upon it is plainly written, and there are none in Rome to whom it is unknown, so there is no excuse for its detention."

"None, noble sir; at the very moment you summoned me, it was in the hands of a messenger, who had orders to place it in your illustrious hands. The delay was owing altogether to my master's having charged old Bianca—a perfect marplot, believe me—with the letter, instead of myself; and what did she do but put it under a little silver statue of Prosperity, that stands on my master's table, to keep it from blowing out of the window, while she gathered up his things that he left strewn over everything;

and by the time she got through, she couldn't remember where she put it, and has had the whole house in a stir searching for it; and it was only about an hour ago—on my veracity, noble sir!—that it was found. And I hope I shall not be blamed for the misdoings of an old woman, who has no merit to boast of except having nursed my master's noble mother; and he is that soft-hearted about her, that if she burnt the house down over his head, he'd not even give her a frown. Will the illustrious captain be pleased to walk into the *atrium*, out of this scorching heat, while he reads the letter and refreshes himself?"

Nemesius stood listening to this voluble stream of words without seeking to interrupt it; and although inwardly fuming, his countenance, as usual, showed no trace of his irritation, and he followed the steward through the vestibule into the *atrium*, preferring to be alone when he read Fabian's letter. Here the delicious shade, the fragrant air, and the soft play of the fountain, brought instant and soothing refreshment; and, throwing himself upon a couch, he snapped the silk cords and seal of the letter with almost feverish haste to get at the contents. It was only a few hastily-scribbled lines, after all, that met his eye:

"'The Jew has again flitted from Rome. May Cerberus devour him! I go to Neapolis in great haste, but, unless the Fates decree otherwise, I shall be back within ten days. "FABIAN."

Nemesius crumpled the scrap of papyrus in his hand; swallowed a draught of the cooled wine brought for his refreshment, and, drawing his toga around him, went away with a heavy heart to occupy himself with duties which, although revolting to his noble instincts, were, according to his lights, imperative on him as a loyal Roman and high official of the imperial Government.

Just at this time several events occurred, attended by circumstance which gave a renewed impetus to the persecution against the Christians. One day there was a special entertainment at the imperial palace in honor of Valerian's birthday, at which all the most illustrious, beautiful, and distinguished persons who composed Roman society were present. Among these was a noble matron, whose personal charms were only surpassed by her virtues and the dignity of her character. Her husband was a high official of the Empire, and they had two sons,—beautiful striplings, who both gave promise of a distinguished future. She was a daughter of the Ancinii, a family which had always ranked high among the old patrician houses of the Empire.

On this occasion the noble lady appeared richly attired, as became her state, but also modestly, and was as usual the centre of all that was best worth knowing in the highest circles of Rome. Among those who aspired to her friendship and now thronged around her was

Laodice, who would not be repulsed, although her advances heretofore had been civilly but coldly received. The apartments being overcrowded, the heat, combined with the stifling perfume of flowers with which they were profusely decorated, became insupportable, and the beautiful matron Sabina fainted in the arms of her friends, who bore her to a couch, and were zealous in their efforts to restore her; none being more so than Laodice, who, kneeling beside her, unclasped the jewelled cincture around her waist, and was removing the folds of spangled Syrian gauze from her throat and bosom, when a large ruby—a single stone set in gold of Etrurian workmanship—which was suspended from her neck by a long string of fine pearls, fell out in full view.\*

The size and splendor of the gem, gleaming under a strong light before their eyes, attracted the attention of the group around Sabina, especially of Laodice, whose passion for precious stones was so inordinate that, involuntarily, she lifted the ornament in her long white fingers, and, holding it up to the light, scanned the carving upon it, then, with a cry of horror, threw it from her as if it had been an asp. Another, moved by curiosity, examined it, and saw rep-

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\* Roman ladies of rank who were secretly Christians wore gems on which were cut the image of the Redeemer, or that of His sinless Mother. Very small images of both, in silver and gold, were also worn concealed on the person.

resented on the face of the ruby, in fine, skilfully cut lines, the "image of Him who was crucified," and it was known by this sign that she who wore it was a Christian. The fact was instantly reported to Valerian, who, purple with rage, approached the noble lady just as she recovered consciousness.

"What means this, woman?" he roared, almost inarticulate with fury, as he held the gem dangling on the string of pearls before her eyes.

She gazed upon the blood-red gleaming object for an instant, while a strange smile irradiated her features; then, rising and fixing her calm eyes upon his, she answered aloud, so that all might hear:

"It means that I am a Christian!"

It was but a short distance from this scene of imperial splendor to the torture-chamber, and not far thence to the horrible dungeons of the Tullian, to which her broken body, still palpitating with life, was a few hours later conveyed. In one of them, twenty feet below the surface of the earth, shut in by immense walls reeking with noisome mildews, and closed overhead by a vaulted roof of stone, through which no ray of light could penetrate, no breath of air come to sweeten the foul smells arising from the great sewer underneath, that drained off the filth of the Mamertine, of which it was part—wet, cold, dark, and filled with creeping things, this noble

matron, delicately nurtured from her cradle, and accustomed to all that was beautiful and luxurious, was consigned to perish, cut off from every dearest earthly tie, for her unfaltering confession of Jesus Christ.

On the same day the palace of Sabina was surrounded by soldiers, and searched. Her husband and sons, being absent from home, were ignorant of what had occurred, and all that awaited their return. The quest of the persecutors was rewarded by a confirmation of the fact they had come to ascertain. What else did it mean but that the entire family were Christians, when the intruders found upon the shrines, in place of the *Penates* who had so long reigned there, small figures in silver and gold representing Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mother, and the Apostles? What more evident proof was necessary? On being arrested under their own roof, where the soldiers were in ambush awaiting their arrival, the heroes of Christ replied to the accusation against them by declaring themselves Christians, and glorying in their confession. The trial was made short by their resolute firmness: they were tortured, cajoled, bribed, tortured again, and finally condemned to die. They were sentenced to be turned into the arena with tigers from India, and when the hour came the Flavian Amphitheatre was packed.

The circumstances, and the high rank of the victims, made the present occasion more notable

than any which had preceded it. The Emperor and his court, occupying their usual conspicuous place under gold-broidered and gold-fringed canopies, presented an array of imperial splendor that dazzled the multitude. The appearance of the victims in the arena, in short white tunics, girdled about the waist by a cord,—handsome, of noble bearing, full of dignified courage and high resolve,—was greeted with a savage roar, with outcries and yells from the tens of thousands who were present to enjoy the spectacle, and who were hushed to a breathless silence only when the iron door that separated the cages of the wild beasts from the arena was thrown open, and, through the bars that still withheld them, the tigers were seen ramping and raging about the narrow space that confined them, while the sound of their savage growls filled the Amphitheatre.

At length—how long it seemed to those who thirsted for blood! how long to those who awaited the moment of eternal deliverance and triumph!—the creaking bars were drawn aside, the tigers bounded into the arena, and, after making a short circle around the wide-open space in which they so suddenly found themselves, their lithe, sinuous forms undulating with wondrous grace as they moved, they suddenly halted, surveyed their victims, crouched, uttering low, savage growls, their eyes gleaming like scintillating flames, their red tongues lapping their

white-fanged jaws, and their tails swaying slowly to and fro. The delay was but for a moment: then followed the deadly spring, which buried their teeth and sharp iron claws in the unresisting flesh of the noble Christians, which had been set as a banquet before them.

How it happened—whether the people were suddenly and mysteriously touched by some electric force of humanity which revolted at so cruel and unequal a contest, or experienced for the moment the natural impulse of man against beast, which made them involuntarily take sides with the men who were being rent and torn by the tigers before their eyes; or whether they were glutted with blood, and beginning to sicken at the sight of such horrors; or whether it was given as a sign and a warning to the imperial tyrant whose vile heart gloated over the inhuman spectacle—none may say: but all at once, by a sudden, simultaneous movement, the great multitude, who but a few moments before were ravening for blood, sprang to their feet, their hands upraised, thumbs turned down,\* uttering roars that made the canvas roof of the Amphitheatre rise and strain its fastenings, as if a hurricane raged under it. But Valerian, enraged nearly to frenzy, turning a deaf ear to the voice of the people and a blind eye to their down-turned thumbs, signalled to the guards below that the

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\* This sign expressed the will of the audience that the cruelties of the arena should cease.



struggle should continue to the death, as it did—no, not to death, except that of the body, but unto a glorious and eternal life, whose joys it has not entered into the heart of man even to conceive! And so, not with despairing cries and moans of bitter pain, but with loud, exulting words of praise, the husband and sons of the noble Roman matron Sabina glorified their confession of Christ, and sealed their testimony with their blood.

Nothing that had yet happened had so infuriated Valerian as the late demonstration of the people in the Flavian Amphitheatre. Was it a sign that the new false system was infecting the populace? In his secret soul he was afraid, and knew not whom to trust, since some even of his own household, and others whom he had most honored and confided in, had abandoned the old sacred traditions of Rome for the novelties which cast dishonor on the gods and threatened a disruption of the Empire. His hatred of the Christians increased tenfold; he wished, with Nero, that collectively they had but one head, that he might destroy them by a single blow. Then he remembered that they had a chief bishop, their Pontifex Maximus, whom they claimed as their head—Pope he was called,—one Stephen, of whom Valerian's spies reported many wonderful things. In his new plan of extermination, he vowed that this Stephen should be destroyed, and made a signal example of, to strike greater terror into

the hearts of his followers. He would set a price on his head, and when he was put to death he would employ every engine of power at his command to root out and exterminate the abhorred sect.

To rout great armies and destroy kingdoms were the achievements most gloried in by imperial Rome, the subjugation of nations her pastime; but these arrogant heathen did not know that as long as time endured, the Pope, the head of the despised Christian Church, would survive all that the powers and principalities, assisted by hell itself, could do for his destruction. They believed the story of the phoenix, but failed to read the mysterious significance of the symbol.

It is recorded that after the long and furious persecution under Maxentius and his associates in power, the former boasted that at last Christianity was exterminated, and that ere the light of another day he would destroy the Pope, who had hitherto escaped the vigilant search of his soldiers, but whose place of concealment they had just discovered. This was on the eve of a great and decisive battle, on the fortunes of which he would win or lose all. Far into the night he threw himself upon his couch to snatch an hour's sleep, after having arranged with his generals all the military *minutiæ* of his plans for the following day, when word came to him that the Pope was slain. "The gods are propitious!" he doubtless exclaimed, and accepting the news

as a sign of their favor, while a serene consciousness stole over him of having nothing more to dread from that source, he fell asleep. But when he marched at day-dawn, accompanied by a splendid army in all the pomp and panoply of war, the invincible Roman eagles overhead, a messenger breathless with haste brought him the tidings that *there was still a Pope*, one having been elected as the other drew his last breath! Elected? By whom? The Christians, then, were not all destroyed, and the Pope lived! The Emperor's bronzed countenance grew pallid, his haughty spirit quailed within him; for he in that moment realized that he had been contending with a mightier power than his own, and his guilty soul accepted the sad tidings as an omen of defeat,—an omen which was verified by the utter rout and ruin of his army before the day closed.\*

Leaving Valerian to vent his fury against the Christians, by issuing an edict against the holy Pope Stephen, and approving stratagems for his arrest, which were so well planned that his escape from their toils seemed impossible, we resume the thread of the narrative.

One day, as he was mounting his horse near

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\* Because certain historical events are so well known to the merest yros in learning as to have become almost commonplace, it is no reason why they should be omitted in a narrative of the times in which they happened, when needed to illustrate an idea.

the Forum, Nemesius heard a gay and familiar voice behind him, and, turning his head as he vaulted into the saddle, saw Fabian Cæcilius spring from his chariot, and, with a graceful wave of his hand, come towards him, his short curly locks bare, as was the Roman fashion, his fine white lamb's-wool toga gracefully disposed over his rich attire, and his countenance wearing its accustomed bland expression of amiable cynicism. There was the usual crowd on the spot; much hurrying of those who were full of business, and loitering of idlers, who were there either for amusement or as spies; and the meeting of the gay patrician with the illustrious commander did not fail to attract attention, both of them being well known by sight to the people.

"I salute thee, Nemesius! Accept my embrace on trust, unless thou wouldst prefer my springing up behind thee, or thou dismount for it—only it is not worth the trouble," he said, laughing lightly, while he drew as near as he could without getting his feet under the horse's hoofs.

"Hast been taking a drive with Phaeton, and been dropped out of the clouds?" returned Nemesius, with a grim smile. "*Per Fidius!* one never knows whether thou art here, or there."

"Here I am, at least for the present," was the good-natured reply. "But hold! what in the name of Æthon is the matter with this bit? Thy grooms deserve the rack for such carelessness. See what they have done!"

Fabian had suddenly seized the bridle, and drawn the horse's head around. Nemesius leaned over to see what mischief had been done, which brought his face near that of Fabian, who was still fumbling with the bit at the expense of his jewelled fingers, which were bespattered with froth, the spirited animal resenting his familiarities.

"It is nothing at all," he said, in the lowest tone; "I only wanted to tell thee, without its being noticed or overheard, that the Jew is back. He has been to Capua. Expect him to-morrow. The stones have ears—the very air itself. Gods! what times to live in! There, it is all right now!" he said aloud, as he relinquished the bridle with which he had been trifling.

"Thanks, Fabian; do not disappoint me, for my last hope hangs upon him," whispered Nemesius, whose hopes were once more rekindled.

"I would commend thee, my Achates, to be moderate in that respect. The Fates hold the threads, and my experience has taught me that he who hopes the less gets the more. Now farewell, my Nemesius! I am on my way to visit the fair Laodice, whose spells have not yet, I fear, subdued thy obdurate heart. Afterwards, lest thou shouldst deem me altogether frivolous, I am going the rounds of the porticoes, to try and discover if the philosophers have yet found an antidote for this miserable existence, the mortal necessities of which render life unendurable. I

learn that some letters of Seneca have just been found in one of the confiscated palaces—original, it is said—and as his life was not of a piece with the austere morals of his pen, I may get from them a hint of what I seek.”

Nemesius laughed. Fabian's affectations always amused him, for he knew how keenly he sought and enjoyed the sensuous pleasures of life, and that he was at heart a perfect Sybarite. Then a quick farewell was exchanged, and they separated.

With the Emperor's permission, Nemesius spent the following day at his villa. That morning when Claudia, half-awake, called Zilla, a soft kiss upon her rosy mouth and his voice told her who was there waiting beside her couch until she should stir from her slumbers. She was soon in readiness for a stroll with him through the fragrant, dewy gardens, loitering here and there beside the fountains, pausing in the shaded alleys to listen to the clear, sweet warblings of thrushes and nightingales; then to the dove-cote to feed her white-winged pets, and laugh delightedly when they fluttered caressingly to her shoulder, some alighting on her golden head, and others on her outstretched hand,—a group symbolizing Innocence fairer than sculptor had ever wrought, or Nemesius ever imagined, and which never faded from his memory. Then back to the cool *atrium*, to the light morning repast awaiting them, where, after pouring the

customary libation as a thank-offering in honor of the gods, they partook of the meal with appetites to which the sweet morning air had given healthful zest.

While the moments sped joyously on, the happiness of Nemesius was tempered by forebodings and expectation. Were his hopes to be realized, or forever crushed? Would the Jew appear? He knew that his thinking more or less would not alter or change matters in the least, but only unfit him for the issue, whatever it might be; so restraining his impatience and dread, he drew a roll of *papyrus* from his bosom, and began to read to his little Claudia the fables of one Æsop, which had just appeared in Rome. Enchanted, she leaned against his shoulder, listening to every word, and keenly appreciating the moral so wittily conveyed through the medium of beasts and birds, as well as of men. While they were thus engaged, Symphronius appeared, to announce the arrival of "an old man, who waits without, with samples of wine, and insists on seeing the master of the villa."

"It is he of whom I spoke some time ago," answered Nemesius. "Bring him hither."

"I beg my noble master to be careful of buying wines at hazard from irresponsible persons," replied Symphronius, in a tone of remonstrance.

"My kinsman, Fabian Cæcilius, recommends him to me; but be assured, my faithful Symphronius, that no wine shall go into my vaults

without thy approval; for I put thy skill as a taster and judge before that of all the world," said Nemesius; upon which the old steward, well pleased, bowed his thanks, and went away to bring in the stranger.

"Do not be frightened, my timid dove, when this man enters; he comes by my request, and I trust him. But perhaps thou wouldst prefer to go to Zilla for a little while?" said Nemesius, an imperceptible tremor in his voice, his brave heart strained to the utmost on the issue of this last effort to give sight to his child.

"No! no! I would not leave thee for one single moment of this precious day; for when shall I have thee all to myself again? Let the old man—ten old men, if thou wilt—come: I am not afraid—here!" she exclaimed, with impetuous fondness, as she clung closer to him, his arm around her.

Symphronius now appeared, conducting a man who, but for his bowed shoulders, would have been of stately height. He was clad in dark, flowing garments, and his head, which he uncovered on entering, was white; his features were cast in a noble mould; his large black eyes, while full of keen intelligence, had yet a furtive expression, as if ever on the outlook for sudden danger; and his hands, half concealed by the folds of his wide sleeves, were long and shapely. Across his forehead stretched an oblique scar, which, however, did not impair the dignity of his



countenance. At his girdle hung several straw-covered flasks, which contained samples of rare wines. He made a low obeisance to Nemesius, who returned a gracious salutation.

"Thy name?" he asked.

"Eleazer ben Asa, my lord," replied the Jew, in a low but distinct voice.

"Thou art most welcome," said Nemesius, who then inquired as to the quality of his wines, their country, vintage, and age, with other questions familiar to epicures. The old steward was summoned, who brought small crystal cups as thin and transparent as air, and the samples were tasted, and found satisfactory.

"But this surpasses all!" said Nemesius, tasting some which he poured from the last flask; "it is worth an *aureus* a drop. Anoint thy lips with this nectar, Symphronius," he added, passing the cup to him; "and leave the merchant with me to settle terms. I have no wines to equal these samples; take the flasks with thee, and try them all."

The steward, jealous of the reputation of his wine-cellar, put up his under-lip, gave one or two quick nods intimating that the assertion was doubtful, and bore the flasks and cups to his own sunny apartment, where after subjecting them to the most critical and approved tests, he was obliged to acknowledge himself vanquished—which somewhat lowered his proud conceit.

In the meantime, this is what was passing in

the *atrium*. As soon as the steward had left them (too well trained to return unless summoned) Nemesius said, in kindly, courteous tones:

"Be seated, I pray thee, Ben Asa."

But the Jew, who seemed not to hear him, was standing as if spellbound, his piercing gaze fixed on the blind child, whose head rested against her father's shoulder, her beautiful, wide-open eyes staring blankly. Some memory, that brought with it a sharp and cruel pang, swept through the man's heart, which turned his face like marble, and almost stifled his breath; but it was only for a moment; for he had been taught by fiery trials to hold his emotions under control, and appear as impassive as if he had no right to human passions. Presently, as if starting from a dream, he said:

"I am at thy service, illustrious sir; may I proceed?"

"At once," answered Nemesius, wondering if the Jew were not some dreamy visionary.

"I have brought a pretty toy for thee, fair child," he said, gently, as he drew a small box from his bosom. "May I offer it, noble sir? It was fashioned by a skilful artist in Memphis, when Egypt was in her glory, and is mine by inheritance. It is very old, but it will please her, I think."

"Our friend offers thee a pretty gift, my Claudia; what sayest thou?" asked Nemesius.

"His voice is kind and true: I like him. But why give me a thing he prizes himself?" she asked.

"It is thine, fair child; make me happy by accepting it," said Ben Asa; then murmured in his native tongue: "It was hers who was so like thee; I thought, when I looked upon thee, that she had come back to me from the dead."

While these inarticulate words escaped his lips, he had produced a small key, with which he wound up some fine mechanism inside the box, the lid of which suddenly opened, and a beautiful bird, its wings half open, sprang out, and, perching upon it, poured out the most transporting notes.

Claudia's delight was unspeakable; she could not be persuaded that it was not a living bird; she touched it daintily with the tips of her fingers; she felt its eyes, its open bill and the vibrations of its body, as the fine mechanism forced the wild trills and soft warblings through its throat. While she listened, her eyes distended with delight, the Jew suddenly flashed from a small, strong hand-mirror a sharp ray of sunlight full into her darkened orbs; but she neither blenched nor winked; they might have been of stone, so impervious were they to any impression. The bird sang on, she all intent, and Ben Asa produced a magnifying-glass of great power, and, leaning nearer to her, scanned her eyes through it, Nemesius watching every movement, as if life or death hung on the *fiat*.

"Just a nearer scrutiny, and I shall be more sure," murmured the Jew. "May I look into thy eyes, sweet child? may I touch them very lightly? I will not harm thee."

Claudia turned her face quickly towards her father; her lips quivered, a vague fright distressed her; she could not understand why this stranger should wish to touch her eyes.

"Thou wilt consent, my child? I wish it, and thou lovest me too well to refuse me so small a thing," he answered to her mute appeal.

The bird was in a wild ecstasy of song; the child felt her father's arm around her, and this stranger had not awakened any subtle instinct of dislike: on the contrary, his voice and his accents were soothing. She had felt his presence at first, as she did that of every one who approached her, either with repulsion or pleasure; there was certainly no repulsion, but a singular impression of passive trust, sympathy, and submission.

"I am not afraid, and for thee—I would die!" she said, pressing her father's hand to her heart. "Yes, do what thou wilt, sir, to my eyes, only do not hurt them; for sometimes I feel a sharp pain, like a knife, piercing them."

"Turn her face full to the light," said Ben Asa, in a low tone; which being tenderly done, he proceeded with gentle touch to turn back the lids, and scan the beautiful blind eyes through a powerful crystal, the brave child remaining

perfectly still and passive. The examination was brief but minute: he had ascertained all that he desired.

"Thou hast a brave heart," he said, as he opened a small gold flask, and touched her eyelids with the liquid it contained, which diffused a delicious perfume around them.

"Oh, that is very good! It cools my eyes, and how sweet it smells! Thou art very kind, sir, and I thank thee," she said, holding out her dimpled hand with sweet courtesy towards him. He held it for a moment in his soft palm, then bent down and touched it with his lips.

"I would see thee alone," he said in an undertone to Nemesius, speaking in Greek.

"Come, my sweet one, we will go now to Zilla, and thou wilt tell her of the wonderful Egyptian bird," said Nemesius, rising. "I wish to have a few words in private with our friend here, then I will come for thee."

"May I take the bird to show Zilla, sir? She is my nurse, and I love her dearly."

"The bird is thine own, lovely child," was the gentle answer.

"Oh, what joy!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands. "I can never, never thank thee, good sir, as I wish! Oh, when I take it to the cascade, to sing to the nightingales and finches, won't they wonder and be jealous!" she answered, laughing cheerily, as with the precious toy in her hands she was led away by Nemesius.

"God of my fathers!" said the Jew, with a burning glow in his eyes, that seemed to quench the tears that would flow; "it is as if I had looked upon the face of my own dead child,—dead on the breast of her murdered mother, near the Sepulchres of the Kings, whither they had fled for concealment and refuge, while I defended my house, not knowing they had left it—my Miriam and my little Ruth! The years have been as ashes to me since that day, and I live—for what? Hunted and cursed, earth has no resting-place for me; the floods have gone over me—"

Approaching footsteps echoed on the mosaic floor; the unhappy man controlled his grief, and when Nemesius resumed his seat, Eleazer ben Asa's countenance was as calm as if no passion of grief had but a moment ago wrung its lines.

"What hopes hast thou for me?—I have faith in thy skill. Half my fortune shall be thine if thou give sight to my child," said Nemesius, in eager tones.

"How long has she been blind?"

"She was born so; but surely thou hast skill enough to give her sight!"

"I would give my life to do so, for she hath moved me strangely; but I can give thee no hope. No human skill can give her sight; there is only One—"

"Even the gods have failed me; who, then, shall open her blind eyes?"

"Thou knowest, my lord, that I am a Jew, and hold in small honor thy gods and their fables; there is only One, the Lord God of Israel, who by His Almighty power can raise the dead, and open the eyes of the blind."

"The Christians say the same of Him—the Christ—whom they worship."

"We know Him not as God," responded the Jew, bitterly; "we trust alone in Jehovah, the God of Israel. Oh, that I had the power of a prophet! then would I call upon Him to give sight to thy child."

"Thy words offend me; they are treasonable to the State, and dishonoring to the gods; but I have promised to give thee safe conduct, and it is much in thy favor that thou hast not sought to delude me with false hopes," said Nemesius, in stern tones, in which there was as much sorrow as anger. "I will bring back thy toy."

"It is my gift to the blind child; it gives her pleasure: do not deprive her of it," besought Ben Asa. "She cannot have too much happiness; and, if thou wilt permit it, I would advise thee to let her mingle with companions of her own age; let her become accustomed to the stir of a life outside her own. Solitude is an evil thing for a sensitive organization like hers, especially when she discovers the meaning of her misfortune. Farewell!"

"I can not have thee leave me without rewarding thee for coming," said Nemesius, haughtily,

offering the Jew a purse of gold, which by a dignified gesture he refused.

"My thanks, then," said Nemesisius, holding out his hand.

"I accept them, noble sir," replied Ben Asa, grasping his hand. "I bear away with me in my heart thy child's image: it is enough."

"I had nearly forgotten this," said Nemesisius, handing him a strip of parchment, which contained a line of writing signed by himself. "It is thy safe-conduct. Show it only in case thy life is in danger."

"I will be prudent, illustrious sir, for thy sweet child's sake, also for thine; for thou hast shown me unwonted kindness. Again farewell!"

Then, gathering his dark cloak around him, Eleazer ben Asa bowed his noble head, and, drawing his hood low over his forehead, passed out of the *atrium*, leaving Nemesisius alone with the grief of his dead hope.



## CHAPTER VII.

## LACHESIS SPINS HER THREAD.

THE surprising revelation that had been made, on the occasion of the visit of the Emperor and his friends to the villa on the Aventine, that the object of Nemeseius' devotion was only his own child, a little blind girl, had at first elated the spirits of the beautiful Laodice to almost a sense of certainty, from the fact that her rival was not one to be feared; but as the days and weeks passed on, she realized the disagreeable conviction that she was no nearer the attainment of what she wished for than at the beginning. All her blandishments—the feminine arts which had never failed her before; the flattering words, the alluring attentions, which had proved so irresistible to others; the tender language of her eyes, so easy of interpretation; the winning smiles, and low-toned voice breathing love—were all lost upon Nemeseius, who was gravely courteous, making no distinction in his manner between herself and other ladies he was accustomed to meet in the imperial circle. She had not even the excitement of jealousy to divert her from her despondent mood: for this “man of stone,” as she sometimes indignantly called him, had no

other love—ah! had he, how quickly, by ways she knew of, would she have such obstacle removed!—no, he had no love except his blind child, whom he worshipped.

Laodice resolved to win the affection of this child, as the surest avenue by which to reach his heart; it was her only hope. And yet she hated the innocent Claudia, who, obeying some subtle instinct, had repulsed and shrunk from her twice. But she would dissemble; she would go to the villa again and again, and finally secure her object by the help of sweet words and gifts; then, if these failed, an amulet set in jewels, which she had purchased from a noted sorceress, and would persuade her to wear, would answer her purpose better still. However, when she went to the villa, it must be under another name, which she could easily assume, as she was a stranger (she imagined) to the household slaves; and her visits must be timed when Nemesis was absent, lest he should suspect her motive, and give her contempt instead of love. Thus she thought and schemed, and lost no time in the execution of her plan.

It was not many days before the eagerly expected opportunity presented itself. As a kinswoman of Valerian, and one of the ladies of the imperial court, Laodice had sumptuous apartments in the palace, which afforded her the advantage, either by her own observation or that of her confidential servants, of knowing all

that was going on, especially of the movements of Nemesisus. One evening she learned that the Emperor, with several of his chosen friends—among them Nemesisus—was going for a day's recreation to the Lago di Albano, and would leave at sunrise the following morning.

Valerian felt the need of a change: his sleep was disturbed, his nerves unstrung; he pined for sylvan shades, the grand silence of the mountains, the refreshing, sun-flecked waters of the beautiful lake at their feet. He would go, leaving care behind him; but there should be no surcease of the shedding of innocent blood in his absence, of the frightful tortures of rack and flame, which sickened even his brutal heart. And he would forget, if he could, the intolerable dread that thrilled the marrow of his bones, when the wonderful and miraculous events which had attended the recent martyrdom of certain Christians were reported to him; for how could he tell the day or the hour when the same mysterious, invisible, vengeful power might, in horror and darkness, suddenly quench his own life, as it had those of certain judges and executioners, who were but the ministers and instruments of his will?

That this man should have distinguished one like Nemesisus not only by marks of the highest favor, but by really entertaining for him something as near akin to affection as it was possible for such a nature to be possessed of, seems, at

the first glimpse, paradoxical, yet it was not so. False himself to the core, Valerian wanted the support of one that was true; corrupt, he needed in intimate nearness to his person a nature of high integrity and pure loyalty,—one as brave as a lion, yet obedient to the laws from a noble, unselfish sense of duty,—not only of high courage as a soldier, but excelling in every quality that sheds lustre on the military character.

These qualities, so antithetical to his own low, grovelling instincts, the Emperor had found in his handsome, grave commander of the Imperial Legion, whose reticence, and absence of the least sign of self-assertion on the score of his distinguished services, still further recommended him to his favor; for especially jealous was Valerian of his generals, and others who were celebrated for their military successes. His insight into character, rendered keener by the suspicious instincts of his nature, assured him that the man he honored was genuine and true, and possessed a sense of honor like fine gold tried in the fire. And, strange to say, hidden away somewhere in his heart—or that which answered for one—there was a chord which the pathetic loveliness of the blind daughter of Nemesius had touched on the day she had been so unexpectedly presented to him at her father's villa; touched as Nero's sometimes was by the beautiful, which he sacrificed as lightly, to suit his mood, as he would have impaled a living butterfly whose gorgeous wings had delighted his eye.

As planned, on the following morning the imperial party left Rome for the Lago di Albano; and Laodice, who had watched their departure from behind the drapings of a window, now waited with impatience the return of the confidential messenger she had dispatched to follow them, and bring her word when the *cortege* was at a safe distance beyond the walls. She moved about her splendid room, restless and furious at his delay; and it would be well for him, when he did appear, if the fine, sharp stiletto lying there on her toilet table among her jewels, did not make closer acquaintance with his flesh than would be agreeable. She wondered if he had fallen into a tufa pit—the Campagna was full of them; or worse, perhaps he had been arrested by some over-zealous guards, to whom it was not an unusual thing to be in advance of their duty. This idea dismayed her a little, and when, turning from the window out of which she had been watching, she saw the messenger standing before her, her relief was so great that her anger was forgotten. Not that she had cared for the man's safety, faithful slave though he was; but she feared that if arrested, and threatened with the lash or the torture, some of her own secrets might be betrayed. He informed her that the imperial party had passed the last arches of the Claudian Aqueduct before he left the Campagna; that going and returning on foot had delayed him; he had not intended to go so far, but wanted to be on the safe side.

She tossed him a silver coin, gave him a message to her groom to have her new chariot in waiting without delay, then dismissed him, and began to array herself for her drive, dispensing with the services of her attendants, whose presence she knew would only exasperate and annoy her at a moment when it was her will to be undisturbed.

Her equipage, befitting a Sybarite, was ready before she was, and no wonder the passers-by stopped to gaze on its splendor. Low hung, and panelled in ivory set in fine, gilded carving, no one had seen its like; it was of the very latest style, brought from eastern parts. The spokes of its broad wheels were carved and gilded; the gleam of gold was on every part—in the broideries on its soft cushions of scarlet silk, in the trappings and fringes and tassels that decorated the small, beautiful Spanish horses; while the garniture of the scarlet reins were small disks of gold, each capped by a gem. An adjustable screen of peacock feathers, like a large fan, could be so arranged in any direction as to shade the occupant from the sun. The thing seemed fit only to bowl over a smooth marble pavement, or along the broad, level alleys of a pleasure garden; but its exterior was deceptive, for it was constructed of the hardest, toughest woods, clamped and knitted together with iron bolts and braces.

The horses arch their graceful, silky necks, and champ their bits with impatience; they beat

the earth with their dainty hoofs; their great eyes sparkle as they toss their heads, and the groom finds it almost impossible to restrain them, when Laodice, in all her queenly beauty, descends the broad marble stairs of the palace, and with superb, sinuous grace in every movement, approaches, stops a moment to smooth the glossy flank of the near horse with her ivory-white hand, calls to the other caressingly by the pet name she had given him, while he arches his neck and neighs softly in response—then steps into the carriage, sinks indolently down upon the cushions, and gathers the reins in her hands, whose wrists have the strength of a man's. The horses' heads are skilfully turned, and they sweep away, followed by *vivas*; for the Romans were never slow in their appreciation of a spirited act, or a beautiful spectacle. Loadice had with her a small, finely-woven basket, containing some dainty presents for Claudia, and the witch's amulet, by which she hoped to work such spells as would crown her desires with triumph.

It was a day full of the buoyancy of spring: everything was bursting into bloom and fragrance; leaves of white and rose-tinted fruit-blossoms drifted and floated on the sun-warmed winds; the fountains tossed their spray so high that Iris cast the vari-colored meshes of her aerial net over it, until the air seemed filled with tattered rainbows; the dreamy brightness of the Roman sky bathed every object, and countless

birds gave sweet voice to the exquisite loveliness of the day.

Laodice, her face shaded by the screen of peacock feathers, leaned back on the luxurious cushions, in passive enjoyment of the exquisite brightness and fragrance which pervaded everything around and about her, while her horses, their first ardor spent, bore her more slowly towards the Aventine. Not that she observed in detail the perfect scenes through which she was passing, but their balmy influence rapt her senses all the same, while her thoughts were busy with the object of her lonely drive.

Arrived at the villa, Symphronius received her with grand politeness and respect.

"I have come to see the daughter of Nemesis," she said, preparing to step from her carriage.

"I am sorry to say, illustrious lady, that my little mistress is away; her nurse took her to the sheep-farm higher up, for a change, the doctor having ordered it. Will not the noble lady alight, and permit her slave to serve her with some refreshments after her drive?" said the steward, with profound reverence. He knew that at that moment Zilla and the child were at the cascade, but he had recognized in this lady the person about whom his master had cautioned him.

By a haughty motion of dissent, Laodice declined the hospitality of the villa, over which



she hoped to reign as mistress at no distant day. She ground her small white teeth under her closed lips, while an angry flush darkened her face, and kindled a scintillating spark in her eyes; and for an instant she could not command her voice to speak, until reflecting that Fate had been adverse, perhaps to prove her constancy, and that failure by no means meant defeat, she handed Symphronius the parcel of beautiful gifts she had brought, directing him to "give them to his little lady with the love of an unknown friend," but reserved the witch's amulet until she should come again, and suspend it about her neck with her own hands, while she at the same time whispered the spell.

Then, turning her horses' heads by a slight movement of the reins, Laodice drove rapidly down the chestnut avenue, through the bronze gate, descending at less speed the mountainous, rocky road. Once she raised her eyes, and beheld through an opening in the trees a vista of incomparable splendor, which for a few moments held her gaze. She saw all the splendor of pagan Rome outspread beneath her, and beyond its mighty walls the superb aqueducts stretching away, throwing grand purple shadows on the sun-steeped Campagna, as it lay in the embraces of the Alban mountains on the east, and of the sea on the west, whose line of coast was defined by a band of silvery mist.

Laodice, by an almost imperceptible turn of her strong, shapely wrist, halted the spirited but gentle horses; her hands, scarcely holding the reins, lay idly on her lap; and while the tremulous shadows of leaves and sunlight covered her like a veil of rare, transparent tissue, flecked with broidery of gold, she sat motionless, gazing down upon the great, storied city, whose marble temples, columns, arches, and monuments recorded the fame of names and triumphs which would be unforgotten while the genius of history survived.

She exulted in all this magnificence, as it gleamed in the undimmed sunshine, while the unfathomable blue overarching it brought out with dazzling effect its almost indescribable grandeur—exulted not only in its splendors, which delighted her proud, æsthetic nature, but because she saw in it a realistic symbol of invincible power—a superb altar, whose trophies were the most priceless treasures of the world; whose victims had ever been the most heroic, the most virtuous, and the most exalted of mankind. They had defied Rome, and lost all in their efforts to withstand the power whose onward march was like destiny; but had not their names and deeds of high renown, like cinnamon and rare spices thrown into the flames that consumed them, only made the sacrifice august, and more worthy the acceptance of the gods?

The grandeur of the scene naturally inspired

a strain of thought like this, although it seemed incongruous to an intellect so apparently shallow as that of Laodice. But it is only the luxury-loving, passionate, sensuous side of her nature we have seen. Under that there was something deeper, which held the key-note to those more exalted sentiments which now moved her to brief forgetfulness of the subject that had for some time absorbed the intense emotions of her heart. She had drawn in as mother's milk, pride of country and race, from the pages of Livy, Tacitus, and other noted historians; for, like many women in those days, she was acquainted with the Greek and Latin literature of her own and of earlier times. She avoided philosophy, satisfied to leave it to graver minds, and to the few of her own sex who had penetrated the secret *arcana*, and taught in the temples of learning and science with distinguished success; but such reading as the "Antigone" of Sophocles, the choral songs and odes of Pindar, the "Alcestis" of Euripides, the graceful verses of Lucretius, the rounded periods of Cicero, and the "Æneid" of the Mantuan poet, enchanted her imagination, and satisfied her mind, exciting it to heroic resolves, and imbuing her undisciplined nature with all the romance of passion. Julius Cæsar had been her ideal; and the regret of her life was that she did not exist when he, like a demigod, trod the earth—her regret until she met Nemesis, who fulfilled her highest dreams.

"I, too, am of Rome, with a Roman soul," were the words that escaped her red, full lips, as if her soul had involuntarily given sound to her thoughts. "And if the gods refuse to be propitious to my suit, I shall go to Hades for help. Ah! my Endymion, the serpent Death that stung thy bride, wresting her from thy arms, I will yet bring thee to know did not give thy heart so mortal a wound as thou believest; I will yet awaken it by spells as soft as the breathing of Paphian flutes, and then—then thou shalt raise me up to thy own heights, until I am worthy to hold the love I have won."

And so dreaming, the superb city gleaming below, and the faultless view beyond; the sun-lighted Italian sky; the soft, golden light that bathed it all, faded from the eyes of Laodice like a dissolving mirage, leaving as its only reality the intense passion that now absorbed her inner life, until a thrush, poised on a leafy branch above her, burst into a roundelay of wild, sweet notes, recalling her to the actual present. A sudden smile brightened her countenance, while a strange, tender light softened the expression of her bold, handsome eyes; for she fancied that it was a good omen, coming just at the moment it did. Had not the oracles in former times revealed the future through birds—and why not now? She gathered up the gold-studded reins in a firm grasp, called to her horses in those caressing tones they knew and obeyed so well,

and the next moment they were descending, with dainty but sure steps, the steep road of the Aventine.

The last resolve of Laodice, before she fell asleep on her sumptuous couch that night, was that she would redouble her vigilance, again seek an interview with the blind child for the purpose of weaving her wiles around her, and persuade her to wear, as a talisman of friendship, the magic amulet, which would work its spell to the height of her hopes.

Laodice's first act in the morning, after that of homage to the *Dii Penates*, was to send for her confidential slave, a Cypriot—whose life, for a certain crime known only to her, was in her hands—and command him to keep her informed of the movements of the commander of the Imperial Legion, emphasizing her words by laying a large gold coin on his palm, which made his snake-like eyes glisten, and his lithe, sinuous form bend abjectly before her in token of obedience and gratitude; then he passed from her presence as silently as a shadow.

That evening, the next day, and the day after, she watched for even a glimpse of Nemesius, in the palace, in her drives on the Via Tiburtina and Via Appia, at the theatre, and in the neighborhood of the Forum and the Temples; but he did not appear, neither did her Cypriot. As if incidently, in conversation with a young Roman Adonis, who was highly flattered by her notice,

she inquired: "What has become of the commander of the Imperial Legion? Has he turned Christian, that he has so completely disappeared from the sight of his friends?"

"When Nemesius turns Christian it will be at the Greek calends," laughed the young gallant, meaning never (the saying had become a proverb). "I did hear a rumor that he had been seen on the Campagna, with a mounted escort, going towards Terracina.—But tell me, hast thou seen the last new comedy? It is divine!"

"I have not seen it," she replied, quietly, and in an abstracted manner.

"All Rome is wild over it; Jove himself might laugh at the wit of it."

"By whom is it written?"

"I—I—really now, by Apollo! I was so carried away with delight of the thing, that I—I am ashamed to say I forgot to ask who wrote it. But see! there in that group near the statue of Hercules is my friend Tullius, who knows everything. I will leave thee a moment to ask him the name of the author, and hasten back with the information," he said, bowing his perfumed head as he left the spot.

When he came back she was not there; nor could he, in all that splendid crowd which thronged the state apartments of the Emperor that evening, find her again.

Laodice had taken the opportunity to retire to the seclusion of her own apartments, which were

situated in a wing of the palace distant from that portion occupied by the imperial family ; and as she glided swiftly through the dimly-lighted corridor, she saw a figure, dark-robed and motionless, standing against the wall near her door. It was the Cypriot. She made him a sign to follow her, then, closing the door, stood confronting him. He knew that his imperious mistress would bear no waste of words, so without any preface, save that of bowing his head low on his breast, he related in distinct but subdued tones the facts he had gleaned, as follows :

“The commander of the Imperial Legion went three days ago, with a noble escort, to meet the envoys of certain Asiatic kings, who have long been hostile to Rome, but now wish to become tributary to her for their own preservation from the invasions of neighboring princes more powerful than themselves. They have landed at Ostia, and with their illustrious escort will be in the city on the day after the morrow, when there is to be a grand pageant at the Temple of Mars, where the Emperor, attended by the Senate and his most distinguished military commanders, will give them audience.”

This was his news, but how he had found out the particulars which he related was known only to himself ; they were, however, satisfactory to Laodice, who dropped some coins in his hand, and dismissed him.

She did not care about the envoys or the

pageant: the only *scintilla* of interest awakened in her mind by the words of the Cypriot was that she had heard where Nemesius was, and felt assured that his absence did not mean a wilful avoidance of herself. She also rejoiced in the opportunity of being able to visit his blind daughter without danger of meeting him. "I will see her, and cajole her with loving words and caresses; under the spell of the witch's amulet, I will fascinate and bewitch her, until she will be happy only near me. Then—then—"

*What*, she did not say; a low, rippling laugh filled up the gap, and happy fancies filled her heart, as unclasping the superb jewels from her neck and arms, she tossed them carelessly, in a glittering mss, upon a slab of *lapis lazuli* near her; then blew a note on a small gold whistle that hung like a toy to her girdle, which summoned her attendants from the ante-room to disrobe her, for she was impatient to be alone with her thoughts; but when she had at last dismissed them for the night, her soft reveries were made bitter-sweet by doubts, which, like harpies, would intrude to rob her heart of its feast.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE WITCH'S AMULET.

THE next morning Laodice ordered her carriage; then opened her jewel-case, and took out from a little secret drawer an exquisitely-wrought gold Etruscan chain, that had long been a valued relic in her family, which claimed descent from the ancient kings of Etruria; and having attached the amulet to the chain, wound it loosely around her arm.

"No one, not even Nemesus or the Greek nurse, could imagine the potent spell lying safely concealed between the two halves of this split ruby, or that the great pearls around it meant aught else than purity. Ah! how deep its significance to me—deeper than the secret of the Sphinx!" she whispered.

A few minutes later she was driving towards the Aventine, her fleet-footed horses bearing her swiftly on. But so rapt was she in her fancies that she was as blind to all the lavish glory of nature and art outspread around her, and in the filmy, golden spaces lying in the distance, as if she had been asleep and dreaming—oblivious of it all, until, having turned from the Tiber,

which sparkled like yellow gold in the sun, and taken the road to the left, she began the ascent.

The horses, finding the road more difficult as they proceeded, now moved more slowly, when suddenly heavy hoof-beats on the rocks above roused Laodice from her trance; she threw back her head with a proud, half startled motion, looked quickly up, and the sight of Nemesus on his great war-horse most unexpectedly greeted her.

The sun gleamed on his burnished, gold-inlaid helmet, with its trailing plume of white horse-hair; on the flexible scales of his glittering armor, wrought with cunning skill in Damascus, and its gilded leather fringes; on the crimson, gold-emblazoned scarf of his military grade, which crossed his breast, and on the massive and costly trappings of his horse.

Never had his grave countenance appeared so majestic and attractive; but her heart grew sick: she was conscious of growing white; she felt detected, because guilty, and breathed a secret curse on the Cypriot for the false information he had given her. Did he not say "the day after the morrow" was the time of the return of Nemesus?

The situation was awkward, but she was no woman with a woman's worldly wisdom and audacity if she failed to tide it over. By the

time they met she had regained her self-possession. Why not? Had she not other friends who had summer palaces on the Aventine? So with brightest smiles she returned his salutation.

He suspected the truth, however; but with grave courtesy remarked:

"If military orders were not so imperative, I would insist on offering thee the hospitality of my villa, and return thither with thee; but I am in attendance on the Emperor to-day, and am due in a brief space at the Temple of Mars."

"How charmed I should be, Nemesius, could it be so, it is useless to say; for not only the famed beauty of thy gardens would tempt me, but my heart longs for another glimpse of the loveliest of all thy treasures—Claudia. The child has stolen away my heart. How is she?"

"Not so well, I fear," he replied; and the tender intonation of his voice told how unutterably dear his little blind daughter was to him. "I believe they were getting ready to take her on a pleasure excursion, but may not have started yet; if they have not, thou canst quickly gratify thy desire."

"My heart urges acceptance, but I shall have to defer the pleasure to another day. I am on my way to visit Julia Severus, who expects me, and her villa is higher up than thine,"

she responded, while she said mentally : "He shall not imagine that I was on my way to his villa ; such a thing would offend his good taste, and his exalted ideas of the womanly virtues."

"I fear being late; pardon my abrupt departure," he said, lifting his helmet for an instant.

"Farewell," she replied, softly, while her eyes flashed a tender light into his, which he either would not understand or did not see; then they separated—he to the Temple of Mars, she to rest there where he had left her, the great ilex boughs meeting in a high arch overhead, the birds busy nest-building among the leaves, the *grylli* scraping their fiddle-strings in the grass.

She watched his retreating form until a turn in the road concealed him from sight; then, listened to the echoes of his horse's feet until they died away in the distance.

"I have at least seen him, which I might not have done for days; and he spake kindly, if coldly; 'tis his way. But I noticed the tender expression that stole over his grave face when I mentioned Claudia. Yes: that is the only chord in his stern heart that is responsive, and the secret is mine. The Fates have been auspicious to me to-day, so far. My other purpose can wait for the next opportunity," said Laodice, in her

low, meditative tones; then she looked up and down the road, irresolute as to whether she should continue her drive or return.

The air was delicious, and fragrant with the wild blossoming things that were opening tender leaves and revealing exquisite tints in profusion on every side; and she determined to keep on as far, at least, as the ruined Temple of Jupiter, which crowned the most picturesque plateau on those rugged heights; but she lingered, for the silence around her was like a spell, the glamour of which made her dreamy fancies seem real.

How much longer she would have remained had not the restless movements of her horses recalled her to the practical demands of life, it is impossible to say, but she at once gave them their will by driving on. The road was good, after the fashion of all Roman roads, but steep and winding, which made the ascent slow, and in accordance with her mood.

She did not wish to lose sight of the hope which she had that day grasped; but could she have imagined the scene that awaited her at the old Temple, she would have urged her horses to greater speed. And while she is moving at a snail's-pace towards it, the reader will have to take a brief retrospective glance, which will explain the situation.

It will be remembered how deeply the kind,

æsthetic soul of Fabian Cæcilius was touched by his first sight of the little Claudia, whose blindness, together with her exquisite loveliness, set his mind in revolt against Nature and the Fates. From that hour he gave his brain no rest in the effort to do, or get, or contrive something which would make her happy, and at the same time do her good. The Jew physician was his first attempt, and it had proved a failure. There was nothing he could think of that she did not already possess. His quandary gave him sleepless nights, for his inner consciousness assured him that there was somewhere in the world the very object he desired, if he could only think what it was; and if he could, he would get it at any cost.

One night, just when his mind was in a chaotic state on the subject, there suddenly appeared to his imagination, with pointed ears erect, a small donkey, a diminutive creature, with slender ankles, and hoofs that would scarcely cover the palm of a lady's hand.

"The very thing!" exclaimed Fabian, with more delight than if he had suddenly discovered some wonderful gem of ancient art. "This will give her motion; she can feel its soft, silky coat, smooth the pointed ears, and feed it with dainties from her own hand."

He knew where he could find one of the sort he wanted; for he had seen them on the Apennines and among the Cisalpine Alps, when some

years before he had started off on one of his wild journeys, in company with certain officials, whose duty it was to inspect the military posts on the route known as Hannibal's Road, which led over mountain ranges, through trackless forests, frozen snows, and other perilous obstacles, the prospect of which, so far from deterring Fabian, made him still more determined to go; for was he not going in pursuit of knowledge? And now, after a decade, the result of all the hardships he had endured, and the perils he had escaped, was—a donkey! The gods, he thought, had certainly directed all things connected with that journey to this end.

The next day he bestirred himself, secured a trusty agent, provided him with passports, gold, letters of safe-conduct from the various officials to governors, prefects, and others along the route, and himself saw the man, well mounted, beyond the walls of Rome, on the way to do his errand. No fear of his not succeeding, with the instructions he had received, and the rewards that had been promised him; he would come back with that donkey as surely as the sun shone.

Months passed; spring, and the long, sweet summer, were over; September, with its rich vintage, its jovial, garlanded processions, was closing in; but no news had yet reached Fabian from the man whom he had sent on what appeared to be a fool's errand. He supposed he must have fallen into one of those fathomless ice-clefts which

are common on the stupendous heights he was obliged to traverse, or that an avalanche had buried him, or that he had been frozen to death in some savage solitude beyond the reach of human aid. He could not tell how it had been, but he gave him up as lost, and straightway began to make arrangements to dispatch another messenger, when one day the agent made his appearance as unconcerned as if he had just come from his sheep-cot on the Campagna. He informed Fabian that he had succeeded in his errand, and that the donkey—the smallest and prettiest ever born—was in the stable, with plenty of good feed, and a soft bed to sleep on after his long, tiresome journey.

The man accounted for his prolonged absence by relating the difficulties he had encountered going and coming, the latter being the worst, as one night his horse had slipped and broken his neck in an ice-chasm, near a place where he had encamped. Then he was obliged to travel more slowly, for the donkey was so young that he could not stand being over-fatigued; and, besides this, he himself was constantly getting bewildered and lost on the great mountains, and would no sooner find his way into a valley (where the people were sometimes friendly, but oftener not), than there'd be other and higher mountains to climb, where he'd get lost again. At last, thanks to the gods! he reached the plains of Italy.



All this, and much more, he related to Fabian, who, tasting his Falernian now and then, enjoyed the recital as much as if he were listening to scraps from a pastoral poem. Needless to say, the faithful fellow was liberally rewarded, besides being highly elated by the interest with which Fabian had listened to his account of the perils and narrow escapes of his journey, and the praise he bestowed on his courage and perseverance. After enjoying a hearty meal in the kitchen, where the best that was in the larder had been set before him by Fabian's order, he went home rejoicing; for now could he not buy the two sheep of that fine breed just introduced from Britain, for which he had been longing, put up a new shed to his house, buy Balba a robe, and give the children some coppers to see the shows?

Never was donkey so luxuriously lodged, fed, and groomed, or so carefully and patiently trained; for he was the pet and the wonder of the stables. The result was that he grew plump, that his coat and his long ears were like satin, and that soon docility took the place of the obstinacy ingrained in the nature of his kind. In the meantime the daintiest and most beautifully garnished trappings that could be devised were made for him; also a narrow, scarlet leather collar for his neck, from which depended a number of small silver bells, each one differing in tone.

Such was the gift which Fabian Cæcilius had

racked his brain and expended his energies and gold to procure for his little blind favorite on the Aventine; and now, all things being in readiness, "Grillo" was conducted to the villa, where Fabian, with Nemesisius, awaited his appearance. When told of her present, Claudia was in her father's arms; she passed her hands over the silky coat of the diminutive donkey, and felt its long, smooth ears, pointed like a faun's, and was at last persuaded to let herself be seated on the cushioned saddle; then, while she held close the hand of her father, Fabian, beaming with delight, led the beast along the terrace. She gasped once or twice, and nearly lost her breath—it was so new to her, being borne as it were through the air; but after a moment, knowing how safe she was, with her father close by her side, with Zilla near, and Fabian leading the strange little creature, she laughed, smoothed its neck, caressed the long, nodding ears, and chattered gayly. Then down the chestnut avenue to the bronze gates, and back, her two guides enjoying her delight like boys out for a holiday; and Symphronius laughing until it was a question how his rotund old body could recover from such an unusual quaking.

"Oh, my child! my bird of beauty! how good it is to see thee so happy!" murmured the faithful Zilla, as she stood apart watching them, and smiling as she had not done for years.

After this the little Claudia required no per-

suasion to mount Grillo, and, with Zilla to guide, go through the beautiful gardens to the spots she loved most, and introduce him to her birds, the cascade, and her doves. In these golden days Zilla often wondered, as she gazed fondly on the child's faultless loveliness, if Fate itself would not relent, and turn aside any cruel shaft that might be aimed at her innocent life, should the future hold behind its veil an evil fortune.

On the morning already mentioned, when Laodice, after having met Nemesius, was slowly and dreamily wending her way up the steep ascent, Fabian had appeared early at the villa, to persuade Claudia, attended by Zilla and himself, to go on a pleasant expedition to the old Temple of Jupiter, where they would have an *al fresco* collation. It went without saying that the little one was to ride Grillo, who by this time knew her voice, and the touch of her soft hand. It sounded pleasant to Claudia, who was in the mood to yield to his winning words and persuasive tones; and Zilla seeing no reasonable objection to the plan, they were soon ready, and off, with a musical jingle of silver bells, and the sweet sounds of childish laughter. Symphronius stood looking after them, his old face beaming with enjoyment, until they passed through the bronze gates, and out of sight; then he proceeded to fill a pannier with tempting viands and a bottle of old Falernian, which he dispatched by one of the slaves, to whom he gave orders not to

"stop even to draw breath" until he reached the Temple.

It was here Laodice found them, on rounding the curve of the road which led to the spot. Fabian turned quickly at the sound of her horses' feet, and seeing who it was, greeted her with his usual airy grace. She, perceiving at a glance who his companions were, returned the salutation with gracious smiles; then drawing the rein with skilful hand, her horses glided to a full halt near them. Fabian led Grillo with his lovely burden to the side of her carriage, saying:

"This is my little cousin, the daughter of Nemesius. Thou hast not forgotten her?"

Laodice put out her hand, and laid it caressingly on Claudia's, who involuntarily shrunk from her touch.

"I have not forgotten her; how could I?" she said, sweetly.

"Nay, my Claudia, this lady is a friend," said Fabian, observing her slight gesture of repulse — "the lady Laodice, who is very fond of thee."

Then Claudia held out her hand, the instincts of good breeding and the thought of her father raising her above her antipathies.

"I am pleased to meet thee once again, dearest child," said Laodice, folding the soft, dimpled hand in her own; then raising it to her lips: "and so charmingly mounted on a little steed, which for beauty and size I have never seen equalled!"

The child recognized the voice, and the same intense repulsion rose within her; but had not her father told her that, should they meet again, she must not reject her kindly-meant civilities? And had not the lady been good and generous since, bringing her gifts, and telling her many beautiful things that were pleasant to hear? Did she not mean kindly? These thoughts passed, swifter than light, through Claudia's mind; there was scarcely a moment's interval between what Laodice said and her reply.

"I am very glad," she answered gently, "thou likest Grillo. Is he not beautiful?"

"He is enchanting! I have seen dwarfs of all sorts, but never one so exquisite as this. I should think him a cunningly-devised toy, were it not for his great, intelligent eyes. Where did the bewitching creature come from?"

"Fabian gave him to me," she replied, simply.

"Wouldst thou doubt my veracity should I swear that Grillo is but a piece of fine mechanism devised by a magician?" he asked, with a mocking light in his eyes, as he turned towards Laodice.

"If I could believe thee, I would lose no time in ordering one exactly like it, at whatever cost," she laughed back. "Behold his long, silken ears! They have a sign-language of their own, could we only understand it."

Grillo must have known that he was under discussion, for he showed his appreciation of it by

giving vent to a shrill braying, so prolonged and frightful that little Claudia's face grew white with terror, while the horses started, laid back their ears, and trembled like aspen leaves. Zilla threw her arm around the child, and Fabian, unable to restrain his mirth, roared. Laodice was nearly frozen with horror while the absurd trumpeting lasted. No one present had ever heard the like; but it ceased, and Grillo reared his head and waved his ears in approval of the effort he had made to contribute to the general enjoyment.

"Do not be frightened, little cousin; it is only Grillo's way of laughing and saying *per Bacco!*" said Fabian to the blind child, as soon as he could make himself heard, and control his laughter.

Claudia's hands were cold and trembling.

"I do not like it; he shook all over, even his ears; I know, because I was smoothing one when he made that dreadful noise. Oh, Fabian! do not let him laugh again—that is—poor Grillo!—when I am on his back!" she said, faltering and almost crying.

"He shall not, I swear by Silenus, his ancestor! Dost hear, Grillo?—never laugh in that way again when thy beautiful lady is on thy back!" said Fabian. Turning to Laodice, he was about to speak again, when he started, and exclaimed:

"What has happened? There is blood on thy arm! Thou art hurt!"

It was not blood, however; it was only the ruby amulet, pierced by a sunbeam, which had fallen against her arm as she lifted her hand to adjust the peacock screen to a position that would shade her eyes from the light.

"That," she said, looking down on the ruby, still glistening like a great drop of blood on the soft white folds of her tunic—"that is only a curious old jewel, not blood."

"It is exquisite!" remarked Fabian, examining it with the eye of an experienced judge of gems, as Laodice held it up to him. "Didst thou meet Nemesis on thy way up?" he asked, carelessly.

"I saw him only for a moment. He invited me to visit his daughter, being so near; but I was on my way to the Villa Severus, to see what has become of my friend Julia," she replied, without a change of countenance.

"The gods have been good in arresting thy further progress," he answered. "Severus and his wife went to Neapolis a week ago."

"The gods have indeed been good in bringing me so unexpected a meeting with friends I most desired to see. Do not feel flattered, however; as, although thou art high in my regards, it is Claudia who is the attraction; is it not so, dear little lady?" she said, turning to the blind child, who was still close beside her carriage, on Grillo's back.

"If it be so, I can only thank thee for thy

kind words," answered Claudia, who thought, "That is the answer my father would have me give. But, oh! how much I wish she had not come, for it has spoiled all my pleasure!"

Laodice turned a piercing glance on the child's face, but it was as calm as moonlight upon snow; she could read nothing there that afforded the slightest clue to what might be passing in her heart. Not that she cared much to know: her mind was too full of her own purpose; it had not once wavered from it since she had found her here so unexpectedly an hour ago. But her opportunity was slipping from her grasp, unless by some bold and strategic move she could make it available; for the Roman sun was growing hot, and soon it would be dangerous for her to remain in an open carriage, exposed to the burning rays. She would, therefore, be obliged to think of something quickly, or leave undone what was of moment to her to be done then. She cast her eyes around, and said, suddenly:

"Fabian, I am going back: the sun grows hot. But before I leave, oblige me by cutting me a spray of eglantine from yonder ruined arch. Its bloom and perfume are so delicious and delicate, and these are the first of the season."

Glad to oblige her, and at the same time display his grace, Fabian, after one or two high-flown compliments, hastened towards the ruined arch, whose crumbling rents and mouldy crevices were draped with the tender green sprays



and delicate rose-colored blossoms of the eglantine. Zilla moved round from Claudia's side to stand at Grillo's head, not knowing what freak might seize him if left alone; and at that instant Laodice, leaning forward, said in low, winning tones to the child, as she unwound the Etruscan chain from her wrist :

"I am leaving thee, beautiful one; but, lest thou forget me, wear this trifle for my sake;" then, with a dexterous movement, she threw it over Claudia's golden head, and the amulet lay gleaming against her breast.

It was done—the witch's amulet was bestowed, with swift incantation, on her for whom it was meant; and it was for Laodice now to await the working of the spell.

What could Claudia do? Had not her father said of this woman, "Do not repulse her kindness," and was not his word a law unto her? How, then, could she, without being rude, reject her gift? But if she accepted it, should she not thank her? And while she was hesitating, her cheeks like a damask rose, Fabian came back with his spoils, and Laodice, almost frightened by her unlooked-for success, received the dainty sprays of eglantine, said a few graceful words of thanks, skilfully turned her horses, and drove off, unheeding the dark, frowning eyes, half shaded by her veil, that Zilla bent on her.

"Nemesius must judge whether his child shall wear her gifts," she murmured.

All felt the relief of the absence of Laodice, and the moments passed merrily. Fabian said and did the most absurd things for his little cousin's amusement; Zilla played on her lute, and sang the songs she best loved; then came the flower-decked feast, spread where the violets grew thickest among the grass; after this they fed Grillo from a gold plate, out of which he ate as complacently as if he had been accustomed to such elegance ever since he was born.

## CHAPTER IX.

## PRELUDES.

STRANGELY enough, Claudia was unwilling to lay off the Etruscan chain, with its jewelled amulet, when, wearied by the fatigues of a most happy day, and very sleepy, Zilla disrobed her for the night. The marvellously delicate workmanship and intricate design of the chain, the facets of the great ruby, the pearls which encircled it, she had traced over and over again with the tips of her sensitive fingers, until the form of each was familiar to her senses, and she knew that they were beautiful.

"Yes, my dear one," said Zilla, in reply to her childish insistence, "they are indeed beautiful; the chain might be made of spun sunbeams, it is so bright; and the ruby glows like a flame, and the pearls are white and lustrous. But, my child, the true worth of a gift depends on the giver; the most priceless thing would lose its value if presented by one who is false."

Here again was the old, puzzling mystery of her life. How was it that Zilla could tell more of the chain and jewel than herself? Her fingers conveyed one thing to her mind, Zilla's words another. But why ask the riddle to be solved,

only to be again baffled? As swiftly as the thought had come, just so swiftly did she banish it; then, throwing her arms around the pale, patient woman, and nestling her cheek against hers, she said, with a little laugh :

“Thou art only jealous, I know; but never fear, good mother, for I love thee—I love thee above all the jewels in the world ! But she—she who gave me this!—oh, no ! no ! How could I ever love one whose very touch makes my heart shiver ! At first I would have torn it off, and thrown it under Grillo’s feet; but he—my father—bade me not repulse her kindness for his sake. And now—now I am glad I did not do so; for it is so beautiful that I like it—yes, very much.”

Zilla listened to her artless words, smoothing back the golden hair from her forehead with softly caressing hand; and, although not satisfied, she forbore to urge her further, thinking it best that Nemesis himself should decide the question; and until then—perhaps not longer than the morrow—what harm would come of her wearing an ornament in which she took such delight? None, she imagined, unless it held some unholy spell intended to work evil to the child. She had, with keen perception quickened by her love, more than suspected the designs of Laodice, and believed she would hesitate at nothing to gain her ends; and might not this costly ornament be one of the instruments employed by her for the purpose—some potent magical device?

While these thoughts were passing through Zilla's mind, Claudia fell asleep, and, lifting her in her strong, tender arms, she laid her upon her dainty white couch. The flutings of a nightingale, full of vibrant sweetness and soft inflections, thrilled the silence; and a moonbeam, drifting through the vine-draped window, cast its luminous whiteness across the breast of the slumbering child, just where the ruby, gleaming on her stainless robe, was stirred by the even pulsations of her heart, until, to the woman's excited imagination, it appeared like a fiery eye watching and mocking her. Nor could she in the days and nights that followed, divest herself of the impression that there was something enclosed within the gem that threatened evil to the innocent one.

Three days passed, and Nemesius was still absent; except this, there came no shadow to disturb the child's life. She missed him, and longed for him; but with a little sigh she bravely sought her usual pleasures, and listened with deepening interest to the daily lessons which Zilla read to her, knowing that this would best please him.

One day Fabian came, bringing Claudia messages of love from her father, and a promise to see her the moment his duties released him; then, her heart being cheered, he soon won her to laughter and merriment, as only he could do. He recognized with a scowl the ruby amulet

hanging on her breast, but made no remark. He had his own thoughts about Laodice, and, being a man of the world, had easily fathomed her character; but why she should have given a jewel of inestimable value to this blind child, was beyond his comprehension. He thought, very truly, that he could learn nothing then and there; to try, would be only expending the moments aimlessly, which was contrary to his principles; but he would be patient and watchful until he found the clue to her motive; and while he was seeking it, she should never suspect him, so entirely guileless would he appear.

These conclusions were rapidly arrived at; then he caught the thread of what Claudia had been telling him about the young doves—oh! so many that they crowded each other out of the cote, and made great trouble trying to get back into their right places; while the old birds fluttered about making the most mournful cries. And she and Grillo were the best of friends; he had never laughed and tried to say *per Bacco* since that day he frightened her so. “And, oh! I forgot to tell thee that a thrush has built her nest right under the beard of Silenus, at the grotto; and Zilla says there are three little eggs in it!”

Fabian laughed and encouraged her to chatter on; and she told him of her lessons, and how she and Zilla made garlands for the statues, and brought the *dii penates* the first and sweetest flowers that opened.

It was a strange study, the face of this man, with its expression of tenderness not unmixed with speculative wonder, as he gazed into the animated countenance of the lovely child. "*Why* can she not see?" he was asking himself. "Her eyes are bright and beautiful: what malign power has interfered to mar such perfection? By the gods! it remains to be seen if the decrees of Fate cannot be made a negation in this case, by crowding her life with such overflowing fullness of joy that she will be happier blind than those who see."

This was a new problem for Fabian, outside all the philosophies he had dabbled in; one not only vitalized by his real affection for the child, but by his love for his own peculiar process of reasoning; and to circumvent Fate in her regard should be, he determined, from henceforth the object of his life. And so it was that this Roman exquisite, this wine-taster of philosophy, this good-natured cynic, this man of pleasure and of varied learning, entered upon a task which, viewed from every point, was the most congenial he had ever undertaken. He was not religious according to his polytheistic belief, and often secretly questioned it, and would have liked to test it by something higher and greater; but he knew of nothing, so what mattered it, when life was so short?

In the cool of the afternoon Fabian said farewell to his little cousin, who had confided many

loving words to him for her father, and went back to Rome to enjoy himself, and watch Laodice.

After several days' absence, Nemesius had a temporary release from his official duties, and hastened with hungry heart to his villa. After embracing his child, he discovered with the quick scrutiny of love that her face was transparently pale, and her movements languid. Alarmed, he questioned Zilla aside, only to learn that she too had observed the change; but as Claudia complained of nothing, and was free from fever, she could in no way account for it, "unless," she added, "the sudden hot weather has caused it." Although this did not dispel his anxiety, he was willing to accept the possibility, especially since, revived by his presence, Claudia had brightened up, and was more like herself.

"What ailed thee, my daughter?" he asked presently.

"Nothing, nothing; only sometimes my head feels light, and my feet heavy, and I get tired when I walk much; but Grillo helps—he would walk about the whole day with me on his back, and sometimes he paces all the way to the cascade without being led, the dear old Grillo!" she said, laughing.

Nemesius too would have cast aside all further anxiety about her indisposition, had he not noticed the feverish glow that now crimsoned her



cheeks and lips, and felt her heart beating too quickly against his arm. "It will not do to question her, lest it alarm her," he thought; "but in the morning the most skilful physician in Rome shall see her."

A heavy sadness stole over the fond father; sorrowful memories crowded his mind, and an indefinable dread, like the leaden stillness that portends the storm, seized upon him. With a strong effort he shook off the intolerable and oppressive shadow, feeling as if he had just awakened from a horrible dream. It had only lasted a few moments, and Claudia's voice sounded to him like the sweetest music; for she had gone on talking, thinking by his silence that he was listening to every word she uttered.

"Who brought thee this costly gift, dear child? It is rarely beautiful," he said, as by a quick movement of hers the ruby amulet flashed into the light, and he held it up by the rich Etruscan chain for a nearer view.

"Oh! I had forgotten! I meant to tell thee, my father. That lady to whom thou didst say I must be polite for thy sake, gave it to me the day Fabian took me to the old Temple. She was on her way to the villa of a friend when she saw us, and stopped a little while. She said she had met thee on the road near our gates, and that thou didst invite her to pay me a visit, but that she had another engagement, and would have to defer the pleasure. Then when she was

going away she threw the chain over my head, and said I must wear it for her sake; and before I could take it off to give it back to her, she had driven away. What could I do, my father? I would have thrown it under Grillo's feet, if I had not remembered thy words; and then when I found out how beautiful it was, I liked it, and would wear it, although Zilla did not wish me to."

That was her artless story, repeated slowly and with sleepy pauses, as if it were difficult to recollect.

The dark face of Nemesis flushed, and there was a momentary scintillation in his eyes as he listened. Like the rest of the pagan world, he was superstitious, placing faith in spells and charms of magic; and, but for the absence of a motive in this instance, he would have believed that the curious jewel had some occult property which was working evil to his dear one; at any rate, he determined that she should no longer wear it.

"I do not like thee, love of my heart, to wear a gift so costly as this from a stranger, however kindly meant. Will it pain thee to part with it?" he said, tenderly.

"Here! here! take it, dearest father!" she exclaimed, slipping it over her head and laying it in his hand; "I no longer care for it. It is beautiful, but last night I dreamed a serpent was strangling me, and I awoke stifled, and found

the chain twisted so tight that my breath was almost gone. It has frightened me all day; take it, then, for it might happen so again. Send it back to her."

"No, darling, we must not offend the lady," he replied. "Zilla shall have it in safe-keeping until thou art grown up. Then thou wilt decide how to dispose of it."

"I shall never wear it again. Some day I will give it to Fabian for a keepsake; he likes it, and says it is a rare jewel," she answered drowsily.

"Had I my will," thought Zilla, who, sitting apart from them, had listened with breathless interest to every word that had passed—"had I my will, I would drop the accursed thing into that fathomless pool up yonder at the old Temple, out of which nothing that once enters is ever seen again."

After Zilla had received the jewel, and gone away, Claudia fell asleep, her head reclining on her father's breast, his arm supporting her. Her breathing was regular and soft, except when, at intervals, a low, quivering sigh escaped her lips. So deep and tranquil was her slumber, that Nemesis bore her to her couch, and laid her upon her pillow without disturbing her. Then he stood for a moment gazing down at her angelic countenance, an infinite tenderness and sorrow in his eyes. He waited, but she did not stir; her flesh was moist and cool, the fever glow had faded

from her cheeks and lips, and she breathed quietly; yet he could not divest himself of a sense of uneasiness.

"Retire," he whispered to Zilla, who had returned, and stood waiting; "I will stay here, and call thee if needed."

Left alone, and scarcely daring to draw a long breath, lest it should disturb the child, Neme-sius disposed himself in a large chair, and sat motionless beside her. Suddenly he remembered what the Jew-healer Ben Asa had said: "She must have companionship with those of her own age; she must be made accustomed to meet strangers, until there is awakened a human interest outside the narrow associations hitherto guarding her life. Then, as her mind expands, it will find space, food, courage, and in the sympathetic intercourse of friends, a better conception of life, which will prepare her for that inevitable moment when her darkness, of which she is now only vaguely conscious, shall be revealed to her understanding. This will be a shock to her, come when it may; therefore, to enable her to bear it, all morbid sensitiveness must be replaced by some healthy conditions."

That is what the wise Jew had said to Neme-sius, and had repeated to Fabian.

"I should have thought of this before," he mused. "The Jew is right: I see it. The birds, flowers, fountains, with the absurd little donkey, will not always satisfy thee; even Zilla,

with all her love and care, is too wise and grave a companion for thee, my beautiful child. My duties—duties as terrible as fate, yet demanded by the exigencies of the times, and the glory of Rome—grim, sickening duties, that wring daily protests from my nature—keep me separated too often and too long from thee; but now I have found the remedy, and, by the gods! no more time shall be lost.”

Until far in the night Nemesius kept vigil beside her; whose dreams he knew, by the smile that half parted her lips, must be peaceful; until the silence, the subdued light, the musical voices of the night stealing in, and the soft whispering of the leaves as the zephyrs dallied with them, soothed him to slumbers as deep as hers.

He was awakened by a kiss, and a low sweet laugh, and the soft clinging of arms around his neck. He saw the sunlight spread in tremulous golden shadows upon the wall, and for an instant he felt bewildered; then he remembered all the pain of the evening before, and how Claudia had fallen asleep in his arms, his vague dread, and his watch beside her,—all of which now seemed like a troubled dream, when he saw that her face was no longer pale, but rosy from sleep, and dimpled with smiles.

“Thou sluggard!” he said fondly, “art thou at last rested?”

“So rested that I awoke in time to catch thee sleeping. I heard thee breathing; at first it

frightened me, then I put out my hand and felt thine, and touched thy dear face, and I knew—I knew who it was, and could not wait, but kissed thee, and laughed at the thought of thy astonishment. How tired thou must have been to have dropped off to sleep here!” she said, in caressing tones “but now that thou art awake, come, let us go out into the warm, sweet sunshine, among the roses; for the birds are calling.”

“After my bath, dear one, if thou wilt spare me,” he answered, laughing, as he smoothed back the aureole of golden hair from her round forehead, and kissed it. Then he summoned Zilla, and left her.

Zilla saw at once the strange improvement in Claudia’s appearance; her fears were relieved, and she laughed when the child told her, with little bursts of merriment between, how she had found her father asleep, and how she had awakened him.

“That was how it happened,” she added; “and I am well now, since he is here. It always makes me ill when he stays away so long. Oh, the dear *Penates* are very good to me, and we will bring them the most beautiful flowers to-day!”

She was indeed better; the heavy languor of the last few days was gone, her voice had regained its own sweet ring; but Zilla observed, when she bathed her, and arrayed her in fresh, spotless garments, that her limbs and hands were tremulous, and her breathing slightly hurried.

Such was the prelude of a most happy day for Claudia, and of—changes which turned the current of her life.

Nemesius lost no time in carrying out his plan. There were a few families in Rome with whom he had renewed friendly relations after his return from Gaul,—whose ancestors and his own had bequeathed a hereditary friendship to their descendants, which, in time, had grown to be almost as close as the ties of consanguinity. Among these he found four or five girls about the age of Claudia—daughters of noble and virtuous matrons, who had guarded them from contamination, and trained them in the best precepts of pagan morality. That his child should become their friend was in accord with family traditions, and, with the consent of their parents, he invited them to make her a visit. Their elders knew of Claudia's misfortune, tenderly sympathized with her, and hoped that her contact with the bright young lives of their own daughters would conduce a little to her happiness.

On the eve of their visit the young people were warned of the little girl's blindness, and enjoined not to notice it, or to question her even indirectly about it, but to conduct themselves in every particular as if there were no difference between her and themselves, as she was not conscious of her affliction. They wondered a little, as well they might, but promised to obey, being too full of delightful anticipations to allow any doubts to disturb them.

Claudia, who had been prepared for their visit, was waiting on the portico with her father and Zilla, when her young guests arrived, and received them with sweet, timid welcome ; while they, as bright as their own sunny skies, were satisfied, and thought how beautiful she was, and how much they should love her. At first she shrunk from them ; their strange voices confused her, and her well-bred instincts, together with her shyness, forbade her examining their faces with the tips of her fingers, by which she would have been able to distinguish one from the other ; but in a day or two all embarrassment wore off, and the girls quite won her timid heart by their gentle, merry ways, their genuine delight in her doves, her magical bird, the cascade ; their docile behavior to Zilla, and their wild merriment over Grillo, as he with absurd gravity bore one and another of them up and down the chestnut avenue. With them, guided by tender, clasping hands, she danced to the music of Zilla's lute ; together, near the fountains, they gathered flowers, and wove garlands for the household deities, and made *al fresco* feasts for themselves under the feathery palms and fragrant limes, where, with merry chatter and endless laughter, they strove to imitate the banquets of their elders, the crushed violets on which they reposed providing the sweet unguents, and oranges their wine.

Hide-and-seek among the jasmine and rose-



covered arbors, through the shady alleys, around the mossy grottoes, and behind the statues, was one of their favorite games, in which Claudia, guided by one or another, took part, running like a young fawn with the most fleet-footed of them all. There was no pastime entered into in which she could not take part. Zilla never lost sight of them; however, she would not restrain them by her presence, but hovered around, to be near enough to prevent any untoward accident from thoughtlessness or a spirit of adventure—for there was a dangerous spot to be avoided where the red wall overlooked the Tiber, and another above the cascade.

With her fine sense of hearing and touch keenly alert, Claudia had learned to distinguish her young friends; and, although she had her preferences, her sweet instinctive sense of politeness restrained her from making the slightest distinction which might be felt. And so the days passed happily in an endless round of innocent enjoyment; and Claudia, although not fully recovered from her mysterious illness of a few weeks before, had now a soft glow on her cheeks, and her countenance more frequently wore its old bright expression, while to Zilla's fond eyes she appeared as lovely as one of the Graces among her pretty, dark-eyed companions.

Nemesius came unexpectedly one day; he was anxious about the child, and wished to see the effect produced upon her by this new phase in

her life. As swift as light, the voice she loved and waited for reached Claudia—although he was speaking in subdued tones to Zilla some little distance away—and her first impulse was to rush to his arms; but would it not be rude to leave her companions so abruptly? She hesitated, and did not move; but, by and by, waiting her opportunity, she stole quietly away to seek him. She had not far to go, for, not having lost sight of her for a moment, he came to meet her. Nestling for an instant in his arms, her cheek pressed to his, and her hungry heart satisfied with his words of endearment and approval, she flew back to her friends to propose some new plan for their enjoyment. Bravely, and for the love of her father, she denied herself the happiness she most prized on earth, that of being near him—a little lesson of renunciation and sacrifice, which was but infinitesimal in comparison with a sublimer one in which she would take part in the near future.

During all these gay, happy days, the secret wish of Claudia's heart was that they were over, so that everything could be as it was before, when there was nothing to interrupt the sweet intercourse and loving confidence between her father and herself; for were not their hearts knit together as one?

The end came at last; her sweet self-denials and patient waiting were over: her guests were going home. Without an inhospitable or ur-

generous thought, she was glad when, after a *festa*, which was so beautiful and gay that it was the crowning delight of their entrancing visit, the hour for their departure came. Farewells, and thanks for the pleasure of their visit and all the kind attentions they had received, were spoken, and they were gone, bearing with them pleasant memories, and tender, pitying thoughts of the blind girl, who had been so kind to them. As the last echo of their glad young voices died away, Claudia still lingered on the portico, refreshed by the violet-scented wind that gently fanned her cheek, and the silence that, like a balm, soothed and rested her.

“Now, now, my father, thou wilt be all mine once more!” she murmured. “Having thee, there will be nothing left for me to desire. I shall hear thy voice, thy hand will hold mine, and we will talk and talk, and wander through all the beautiful places, and rest under the great ilex trees, and by the fountains; and thou wilt laugh at the foolish things I tell thee, and there will be no strangers to come between us, and all will be just as it was before.”

When Zilla presently came to seek her, it was in this happy mood she found her, singing little snatches of song without words, that she had learned from the nightingales. But *were* things to be as they were before?

## CHAPTER X.

## FABIAN'S GOLDEN SANDS—SHE KNOWS AT LAST.

IT had been a sultry day, but twilight now tempered the heated atmosphere; and when the stars began to glimmer through the purple shadows, a soft breath of air from the Tiber whispered among the leaves. The flowers lifted their drooping heads, and offered incense; *grylls* shrilled their pæans under the violets, among the grass; glow-worms, like pale, lustrous emeralds, gleamed out of the darkness in fantastic constellations; and the nightingales, among the roses and orange blossoms, or perched high on the feathery palms, poured out upon the night the songs which filled their hearts.

And now a tremulous radiance wavered through the shadowy spaces, growing brighter and brighter, until the stars paled in its increasing effulgence, and the full moon rose above the Aventine in such a glory of silvery whiteness, that the fountains, transfigured by its splendor, looked like showers of diamonds, and the marble statues appeared indeed like deities clothed in vesture of celestial light.

“Come, my dear one, we will go out into the beautiful night. Throw a light cloak about her,

Zilla; we will go and find a place under the old trees to rest, and talk, and grow cool," said Nemesius, who had seized the opportunity of an *interregnum* in his duties to spend an hour or two with his child. An oppressive heat still pervaded the interior of the villa, and he longed for the open air,—for air that had no taint of blood, and which the echoes of barbarous shouts and dying groans from the arena could not reach.

"Oh, how sweet!—I smell roses, orange flowers, carnations, lilacs; now one, now another, now all together! And listen, my father, to the nightingales! And to have thee, with all this! Oh, I am too happy!" said the child, kissing the hand to which clung, and pressing her cheek upon it.

"It is indeed refreshing to be here, and to have thee so near, my dearest one; it rests me. Here I breathe and—forget. It has been very hot in Rome to-day, and, what with the crowds, and ill odors, and things more unendurable still, I was rejoiced to find I could escape it all, to spend a little while with thee. Here is our resting-place, where the ilex and palm trees make a roof above us, so close that the moonbeams can scarcely steal through. Sit thou here, my sweet. Gods, how delicious!" he sighed, as he stretched himself on the moss-covered bank at her feet, his head upon her lap.

Claudia passed her soft hands tenderly over his still throbbing temples, and, with soothing words

of endearment, promised, with all the strong faith of a child, to make him well, and that he should never, never be so tired and hot again. He listened, her voice falling like dews of refreshment upon his heart, until his mind regained its usual calm, and he could enter into her little world of fancies, and discuss them with her as usual. He also had something to say to her, which he had good reason to fear would distress her, the very thought of it having added no little to the extreme discomfort of the day. But it was for her good, which must not be sacrificed to avoid giving her momentary pain.

After the little ripple recently made in her daily life, Claudia had imagined that, as soon as her young guests had taken their departure, everything would be just as it was before. For a brief time—except for her strange illness—his expectation seemed to be realized; but now she was to hear that which would foreshadow changes she had never dreamed of, and which would fill her mind with distress, and a vague sense of alarm.

“Wouldst thou like to know how some of my time is spent down there in the great city, my child?” he asked, after she had told him all the little events of the day.

“Oh, so much! I have told thee everything that I have been doing, and all that has happened since thy last visit. It is but fair thou shouldst tell me, in turn, some of the things that

keep thee away so much from me. Now, my father, I wait," she answered, with a merry little laugh.

"I have had the old palace opened—the home where thy mother was born, and spent her early youth, until she left it with me, my wife—"

Nemesius paused an instant, wrung by a bitter pang at the thought of all that his words recalled.

"Zilla has often told me of it," was the quiet answer; "such a stately, beautiful palace it was, she said. I am glad, my father, that it is open to the warm sunshine and air. Some day thou wilt take me there."

"It is to be repaired and made beautiful for thee, my pretty one."

"For me!" she exclaimed, breathless.

"For thee, yes. Listen, my child. We are going to live in Rome a month or so. There thou wilt meet again thy young friends, and know many of thy mother's and mine, who will love thee for her sweet sake; then we will go away to the sea, perhaps as far as Capreæ, until October—"

"And then?" she asked, low-voiced like a sob.

"Then, daughter mine, a month here, after which we shall live in the old palace in Rome until Spring—"

"I can not! *I can not!*" she sobbed, throwing herself upon his breast; "the thought of it stifles me!"

"Will not I be with thee?" he said, tenderly.

"Thou! Oh, that would be enough; but strangers frighten me. Oh, I never, never wish to go away from my sweet, quiet life here!"

"But, my sweet one, such a quiet life is not good for thee; it will be best for thee to know people, and get used to them, now that thou art growing out of thy childhood. Believe me, thou wilt learn to understand and enjoy life in this way more than thou dreaimest; and is it nothing to know that I will be often with thee—more often than now?" he asked, his hand laid lightly on her head.

"It is all—*all!*" she said, after a silence of several minutes; "I care nothing for the rest. If it is thy wish, let it be so; thou shalt find, my father, that thou hast not a little coward for thy daughter. I am a silly child, but I believe thy words, although I do not understand all that they mean; and, knowing that I love thee, and that thou lovest me, it is enough. But thou hast said nothing of Zilla," she added, in quick, questioning tones.

"Zilla shall never be separated from thee; and thou shalt have flowers and fruits from thy own gardens up here, and nothing shall be spared for thy happiness," he said, pressing her head to his breast, and kissing her golden hair, proud of her brave spirit even while deeply touched by her pain. Then he began to talk of other things, and told her pretty myths of mortals who had



been transformed by the gods into flowers and plants,—the very ones in whose fragrance she most delighted,—until, full of beautiful fancies, her sorrow was for the moment forgotten, and she was her blithe self again.

When Nemesius, after a farewell embrace, left her, to return to Rome, Claudia stood on the portico, listening to the echo of his horse's feet, until the sound was lost in the distance; then, placing her hand in Zilla's, she told her that she was sleepy and tired, and wished to retire to her couch. She was very quiet while preparing for the night's rest,—a few gentle words and a kiss were all; then, laying her head upon her pillow, she closed her eyes.

Zilla stole quietly from the room, but returned later to close a window, through which a strong breeze entered; and as she paused an instant, to see if her movements had disturbed the child's slumbers, she heard her weeping softly; she flew to her, and with words of endearment sought to ascertain the cause of her tears, that she might better know how to comfort her. Gathered in Zilla's arms, her head reposing on her kind breast, Claudia at last confided her grief to her. The woman saw at once how vain all efforts would be, at that moment, to reconcile the child to the dreaded change; for had not every fibre of her heart taken root in this her home, striking deeper and growing stronger year by year? and was it not natural that the sudden strain

should hurt and wound? 'Time only, and the influence of parental love, could reconcile Claudia to the ordeal that awaited her.

Zilla wisely refrained from ill-advised words of sympathy, but soothed with endearing tones and tender caresses, knowing that in some cases these avail where words of consolation are useless; patiently and tenderly she waited, until the stress of the child's grief ebbed away in sighs,—until tears ceased flowing from the blind eyes,—until the beating heart lapsed into gentle pulsations, and a soft slumber stole over her wearied senses. Fearing to awaken her, the kind nurse still held her in her arms, the golden head upon her bosom, and the warm, fragrant breath fanning her own white cheek, now drenched with tears which her darling's grief had wrung from her heart.

"Oh, gentle heart!" she thought, "why must they take thee from this little world of thine, which so fills thy life with innocent enjoyments? Thou art not as other children; what suits them may not be best for thee. What is it that whispers, without words, a warning of unspeakable sorrow, while my flesh shivers as if the shadow of an awful presence were passing over me? Keep guard, oh, ye gods! who defend the weak, over this helpless one; suffer no adverse power to darken her life, as it has darkened her eyes, and I will not be sparing of sacrifice upon thy altars."

Then Zilla, after the mysterious shadow had passed from her spirit, chid herself: she had been unnerved. The night air, sweeping up from the Tiber, was chilly, and had made a low, mournful whispering among the leaves of the old trees. She must not, for the dear child's sake, give way to dismal fancies and presentiments. No! she would gird up her courage, and spare no efforts to make the trial more easy and pleasant to her. This was the resolve that crowned her self-communings.

Claudia had also made a vow, in the midst of her stormy grief, to the end that she would, without a murmur of discontent, and as cheerfully as she might, acquiesce in her father's wishes, knowing that whatever he proposed was for her best good—nothing could ever shake her belief in that. And, having so determined, the struggle ended as described, when she fell asleep in Zilla's arms, resting there until a faint, rosy glow illumined the room; then the fond watcher laid her upon her pillow, waiting a moment to see if the movement had disturbed her; but her slumber was uninterrupted, and she retired to her own couch, not to sleep—her mind was too anxious for that—but to wonder in what manner the coming change would affect Claudia; and she dreaded the moment, which now seemed to be inevitably approaching, when she would discover that her eyes, unlike the eyes of others, were darkened and sightless.

The contemplated change in the life of the little recluse on the Aventine met the high approval of Fabian, by whose advice it had been urged. Had not the Jew-healer, Ben Asa, given him the soundest reasons why, for her own good, it should not be delayed? And had not he himself sworn by the mother of the gods to devote himself to the purpose of making up to her, in every conceivable way, the loss inflicted on her by Fate? He knew also that some one of judgment and taste must supervise the renovations which were to be made in the old palace up there in the neighborhood of the Forum Trajano, it had so long been given over to darkness, mildew, and dust; and, as his kinsman could not spare time from his military duties to apply himself to that object, he blandly offered to take the matter into his own hands. Nemesisius was grateful, but hesitated to take advantage of his generous offer, until Fabian with friendly insistence gained his point.

Fabian Cæcilius was a rare compound of qualities both admirable and eccentric. He set precious value on Time's golden sands, life, he declared, being too short to waste a single grain, an opinion which his constitutional activity of mind and body had warmed and fostered until it ripened into the governing principle of his existence. He classified his pleasures as duties, and enjoyed them all the same, and was ready either to plunge into deep questions of philosophy or

expend his ingenuity in unravelling an intrigue. Above all things, he detested interregnums as much as nature abhors a vacuum, and any opportunity, great or small, by which he could avoid them, was welcome. He gleaned all that was brightest and best in his intercourse with the world, leaving the impression on some that he was wise, on others that he was foolish—and he laughed at both. He was not by any means a pessimist, although, with rare exceptions, he despised human nature, because he thought he had fathomed all its weakness and all its meanness; and it amused him to experiment with it by assuming, like a chameleon, the color of every leaf he fed upon, knowing what would follow when his victims compared notes.

Fabian was eminently good-natured, loved luxury in its place, and was always as generous with his gold as with his advice; by which it must not be understood that he was officious with the latter, for, with all his peculiarities, he was in every sense a Roman gentleman. His movements were so erratic that his acquaintances were never sure of finding him; one day he would be seen north of the Tiber, perhaps in the neighborhood of Tarquinii, at the unearthing of an ancient Etruscan tomb, in search of *intaglios* of *pietra-dura*, or a fine fragment of *alti relievi*, later he was visiting his farms and vineyards on the Alban slopes, inspecting his imported bullocks, introducing improved wine-presses, and

giving personal inspection to his olive and orange groves; from that to Salerno, to examine some rare conception of Hellenic genius wrought in deathless marble, which, lately discovered under a Grecian temple, had just been landed.

He believed that true friendship was rare, its attainment being so environed by difficulties that few persons had courage or constancy sufficient to overcome them; and considered that a man who could count two friends in a lifetime was singularly favored by the gods,—a fact verified by the ages. Yet he repulsed none; it was the easiest way, and also gave him wider scope for the study of mankind. He was generally liked for his good-natured, pleasant ways, and, as his satirical wit often left a deserved sting, none cared to offend him. His courage no man questioned; he was distinguished for his handsome person, his graceful manners, and was so enormously rich that Valerian Imperator, with a covetous eye to his possessions, secretly hoped that he would some day become a Christian. But under the sparkling shallows of this man's life were depths which he held too sacred for the common gaze—where, like pearls of great price, lay many a tender, noble resolve, and a capacity for friendship whose rare quality was to be crucially tested in the near future.

Fabian entered with zest on his voluntary and congenial task, and his æsthetic soul was more than repaid by the rare and ancient treasures of

art which he discovered in the old palace of Serventus Cæsius. The rooms were spacious, and separated by pillars, some of which were of rose-tinted marble, others of malachite, others again of porphyry, and some also of the purest Carrara. The vaulted ceilings, frescoed by Grecian artists in graceful delineations of mythological fable, looked down in colors as vivid as if the fingers which wrought them—gone to dust long ago—had just completed their task. Cornices of *alti relievi*, full of graceful, poetic fancies, with festoons of flowers carved in alabaster apparently depending from them, enriched the walls; the great casements were set in deep, wide embrasures, and shaded by heavy draperies of Oriental silk, stiff with gold embroidery; there were tables of carved citrean wood, of *lapis-lazuli*, of amber; there were couches and chairs of ivory and of finely-wrought brass.

Groups of statuary gleamed here and there through the shadows, full of deathless beauty. "Leda and the Swan" stood between two rose-tinted pillars; in another of the silent rooms, near a window, and apart from all else, was "The Parting of Achilles and Briseis;" farther on, standing pale and beautiful, was "Eurydice and the Serpent;" while the white carven forms of "Prometheus and the Nymphs" shone dimly in the distance. There were ornaments of gold carved with cunning skill, vases older than Tarquin, and wonderful crystal urns from an Egyp-

tian temple—all and everything covered with the fine dust of years.

Fabian found a corresponding magnificence throughout the old palace, only modified to an appropriate fitness in various parts. Much of the splendor was tarnished; some of the rooms leaked, and were mildewed; draperies hung tattered from their supports, and an insufferable damp, mouldy smell pervaded the air. There was much to be done, much to be re-arranged, and it may be imagined that he allowed no waste of time to delay the work of renovation.

Nemesius sometimes dropped in, and together they made choice of Claudia's rooms, which fronted south, overlooked the fountain in the court, admitted plenty of sunshine; they were soon transformed into a very bower of loveliness. Conspicuously placed were three marble statues, of Joy, Prosperity, and Happiness—the father's gift—which he fondly hoped would preside over her existence. Fabian remembered that she could not see all this harmony of color, this beauty of design, or the golden sunbeams that danced over the mosaic floor; the thought was never absent from his mind, or the impression that she, like some precious jewel, should have the most exquisite setting that the skill of man could devise; and upon this idea he expended the riches of his poetic fancy and his conception of the ideal, until, when all was finished, even his fastidious taste was satisfied.



With all its ancient splendors renewed, the palace was now ready for occupation—not the least thing seemed to have been forgotten—when suddenly it occurred to Fabian that it would be proper a matron should preside over the establishment during Claudia's residence. Zilla was well enough at the villa on the Aventine; but here it would be a different thing, and the proprieties must be observed. Prolific in resources as he generally was, on the present occasion however he was slightly bewildered as to how the difficulty should be met, and rushed off to find Nemesius, and explain the dilemma.

"I have already thought of that, my Fabian. Hast thou forgotten our relative, the Princess Vivian Cætani, who has secluded herself from the world ever since she became a widow?" he asked, with his grave smile.

"Yes, yes; but I have heard such extravagant stories of her grief, I thought she had followed Cætani to the shades long ago. What of her?"

"I have written a letter, inviting her, for the sake of my child, and as a favor to me, to visit us; but I am in doubt of her acceptance."

"Hast thou dispatched the letter, Nemesius?" asked Fabian, quickly.

"Not yet; I will send a messenger with it to-morrow at day-dawn."

"Give it to me: I will go myself; but where shall I find her?"

"Can it be possible thou hast forgotten the

old gray villa on the Alban slopes, and, towering high above it the pinnacle of rock on which Juno stood to watch the fate of contending armies? Hast thou forgotten dark Soracte looming in the distance, and the far-off white line where the sea beats along the Latian shore? We saw all that and more when we were boys up there for a holiday, and used to spend the time climbing heights and exploring depths which only goats could reach," said Nemesius, his eyes brightening with the long-ago pleasant memories.

"Yes, yes : I recollect perfectly, since thou hast recalled it. She was a kind soul, though sharp about her grapes and melons," said Fabian, laughing. "But what a folly to bury one's self alive! If I am ever mad enough to do so, may Apollo speed one of his swiftest arrows through my heart! I will take the letter, and if I have not forgotten the art of beguiling a woman's senses away by soft speeches and agreeable flatteries, we shall have our Princess here without unnecessary delay."

"May the gods speed thy mission, my Fabian, for it is one of love! Here is the letter. How soon wilt thou leave?"

"Within the hour. Farewell!" replied Fabian, gayly, charmed by the sparkle of a new bubble in his experience.

Nothing could have been more suitable than the arrangement decided on, if the Princess Vivia

could be prevailed upon to accept the invitation so cordially offered; for this noble lady, now past middle-age, was a widow of great wealth, who ever since the loss of her husband had lived in the deepest seclusion up there in her old gray villa on a slope of the Alban hills, with huge, towering rocks and forests above it; with orange and olive groves, vineyards and cornfields\* around it; and a vista across the Campagna to the sea, in front. Occupied with the cares of her little world, and keeping in order her peasants, who adored even while they feared her, the monotonous years had dragged on, shadowed by her grief, until there were times when nature rebelled against it, and she found herself involuntarily wishing for a change.

When, having welcomed Fabian and made him partake of the refreshments she had at once ordered to be set before him, the Princess learned the object of his visit both from himself and from the letter of Nemesius, she gently recalled to his mind the sad bereavement she had suffered, and her long seclusion; saying that she had grown old in her solitude, and forgotten the ways of the world, and that—as was to be expected—every one had forgotten her. It may be imagined with what suave denials Fabian met her objections, and all the compliments, pleasant assurances, and earnest arguments he made use of to convince

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\* In Europe wheat and other cereals are spoken of as corn.

her of her mistake; and how at last, with ready tact, he invented so many charming things to prove she was under a delusion, that she showed signs of giving up, and asked a night to consider.

Her hesitation was, however, partly assumed, as he suspected; for just about the time of his visit she was weary almost to death of the monotony of her existence, and had been secretly pining to revisit Rome and take a peep—only a peep—at what was going on in the gay patrician circles of which she was once a conspicuous ornament. But she had been posing so long as a disconsolate widow, and had closed her door so resolutely against the world, that she could not exactly see how she would be able to dismount gracefully from her pedestal, until this invitation, which certainly involved a family duty, offered the wished-for opportunity.

“It would not do,” she reasoned, “for the daughter of Nemesis, considering her blindness, to live in that great, rambling palace with only the servants; I should be blamed to permit it; therefore”—with a sigh—“I will sacrifice myself to the family dignity. Yes, I will leave the solitude which has been made sacred by my sighs and tears and sorrowful memories, and where my bereaved heart has found a sad repose, to go and act a mother’s part towards the unfortunate child of my kinsman.”

With the help of this salve to her self-love, and Fabian’s silvery tongue, the disconsolate Princess

dismounted her pedestal without in the least compromising her dignity, taking credit to herself for a noble disinterestedness, while all the time she was subserving her own object. She talked it over with Fabian in the morning, and gave him a letter to Nemesius, the substance of which was that, after mature consideration, she accepted his invitation. She required a week for her preparations; there were so many business affairs to be looked after, and things to be planned to prevent idleness and confusion during her absence, she informed Fabian that she could not possibly fix on an earlier date; then they parted, and he went away, believing in her almost as much as she believed in herself.

"She is coming, Nemesius; here is her letter," said Fabian, as soon as they met at the old palace, where the former chanced to be when the latter called to inquire where it was likely he should find him. He threw himself on a couch with his usual easy grace, and when Nemesius finished reading the missive, he said,

"Vivia is a discreet woman, and it is highly satisfactory to know that she is coming; but, if I am not mistaken, she will quite enjoy a nearer view of the pomps and splendors of life in Rome. However, one will be wise to take no notice; for she will prefer it to be believed that she has not lost sight of her sorrow, but is making a sacrifice of herself. That is the way I read it."

"I leave her to thee, my Fabian; I am only a

rough soldier, who does not understand all the delicate intricacies of the feminine character," said Nemesius, with a grave smile. "If she is good to my little daughter, I shall ask no more; meantime she must receive all honor as the head of my house and our kinswoman."

"Yes, yes, by all means! I am willing to get up a private apotheosis of her defunct prince, if it will contribute to her happiness, and shall place myself submissively at her disposal. Pour me a cup of that old *cœcuban* wine, then I must be off to the Baths of Sallust, where I have an engagement." He lifted the gold drinking-cup, poured a few of the sparkling drops in libation to the gods, and drank the wine. "Shall I find thee on duty at the imperial palace to-night?"

"No," was the quiet answer; then farewells were exchanged, and they parted.

That evening, Fabian, faultlessly attired, his manner full of that irresistible charm which is too subtle to be exactly defined, appeared in the imperial circle. After making the customary obeisance to Valerian, who tossed him a few coarse words, which made men laugh and women blush—words to which Fabian returned so witty a rejoinder that he not only parried their coarseness, but made the tyrant roar with laughter—he slipped through the crowd of courtiers, and noble, richly-attired women, who were pressing around, and went in search of Laodice.

After passing through two of the immense

rooms, both thronged with the gayest and best of the patrician society, he caught sight of her as he entered the third, and in time reached her, as cool and unruffled by the impedimenta which had opposed his progress as if he had just stepped from his dressing-room.

Laodice was, as usual, arrayed with splendor—in rich foreign silks brodered with gold, and Syrian gauzes spangled with pearls—darkly, superbly beautiful; such a vision as Cleopatra must have presented to Cæsar, when, coming to conquer, he was vanquished by the wonderful charms of the “sorceress of the Nile.” She was surrounded by flatterers and adorers, but her eyes lighted up with additional brilliancy when she saw Fabian, for she felt sure that now she should hear something of deep interest; nor was she deceived.

“A glad greeting to the long-absent!” she said, laughing; “when didst thou return to Rome?”

“One can be in Rome and yet a thousand miles away. My being here is assurance that I have just returned,” he said, with inimitable grace, as he bowed his perfumed head over her hand. She accepted the incense of his subtle flattery with such satisfaction that she forgot to press the enigma it implied. A fusillade of talk followed, replete with wit and satire on his part, and of sparkling repartee on hers; then she led him into a cabinet to show him some ancient

*intaglios* in *pietra-dura*, and other rare relics of a past age, recently found by a peasant, who in digging a well on his little farm on the Campagna, suddenly discovered that he had broken through the roof of what had once been a portion of a house. That was the story, common enough to be credible; and Fabian, always enthusiastic about any probable clue to the sites of the old dead-and-buried cities of Latium, listened eagerly, and examined with intense interest the curios which Laodice took out of a case for his inspection. Their date and workmanship proved their high antiquity.

"I suppose they are excavating," he said, replacing the gems; "if so I shall visit the site tomorrow; for these can not be all, and I would not lose the opportunity to secure a few if they are to be bought; if not, there are other ways," he said, laughing.

"They have not begun yet, but the place is guarded. The Emperor has no time to give to such matters; those detestable Christians allow him no repose day or night," said Laodice. "I wonder the gods don't make short work of them; then one would not be obliged to hear so many disagreeable things."

"It is a wonder," said Fabian, dryly; "but I am reminded, by those rare things thou hast kindly permitted me to examine, of having seen thy Etruscan chain, with its superb ruby, on the neck of my little blind cousin up yonder on the



Aventine. Why not have bestowed it where its splendor would be appreciated—on me, for instance?"

His words were careless, but his eyes were looking into hers with an intense directness, which, for an instant, made her heart quail; but for an instant only.

"Because it is so precious I gave it to her, thinking it well suited to one whom the gods have exalted by her wondrous loveliness, and her singular misfortune."

"Thy gift was, then, through her, an offering to the gods? A most pious sentiment, which I can not sufficiently admire," he replied, with a smile, which to one unacquainted with him might mean either approval or mockery. Laodice understood its true significance, but made no sign.

"I hope the beautiful child is well?" she said, in soft, quiet tones.

"Perfectly so; she looks like a young Hebe."

"I hope she wears my keepsake?"

"I did not notice, but I have a vague recollection of her telling me that it had been put away for her until she should be grown up. I believe her father thought the ornament too valuable for a child to wear," he replied, in tones of easy indifference, as he looked away, and bowed to a friend who formed one of a group near the entrance; then he stepped aside, to exchange greetings with another who was passing.

Laodice ground her small, white teeth together,

and the angry blood pulsed with great throbs through the arteries of her throat into her head, until her eyes felt as if they would burst from their sockets; she held up her fan of peacock feathers to shade them a moment from the glare of the lamps, and to recover herself.

"To be so baffled, after all! Curses light upon her! but I will not be defeated!" she muttered.

"Pardon me!" said Fabian, as he returned; "I had a word to say to a friend, and should have lost my opportunity had I not seized it before he passed. Didst thou observe him? He has the grace and beauty of a woman blended with a most perfect manliness; he is going to be a second Cicero. I was at the Forum yesterday, when he had all Rome to listen to his oratory. It is refreshing to know that Roman eloquence is not to be a thing of the past. Shall we look for our friends, who are doubtless ready to assassinate me for thy absence?"

He offered his hand to conduct her back to the superb apartments they had left, which were more crowded than ever. Fabian was assailed on every side by smiles, salutations, and sparkles of epigrammatic wit, which he returned with interest; but now their way was blocked, and an elderly matron, whose wrinkled neck and arms were loaded with jewels—whose high, Roman features had grown sharp, and her head tremulous with incipient palsy—laid her hand upon his arm, claiming his instant attention.

"Thou art the very person I have been searching for all through this crowd! I am out of breath," she said, laughing; "but, having caught thee, I will not let thee stir until I hear what is going on up there at the old palace of Serventus Cæsius. Is it true that it soon will be occupied?"

"It is a fact," he answered, smiles lurking in the corners of his eyes.

"Who will occupy it?—tell me, Fabian; I want none of thy jests."

"The commander of the Imperial Legion—Nemesius, and his daughter, I am informed."

"But is it true? Who is thy informant?"

"Nemesius himself," was the brief answer, yet pleasantly said.

"Well, the gods be praised! The man is recovering his senses at last; and, as a final proof of his sanity, will marry, I suppose, some noble Roman beauty, who will be a mother to that pretty blind girl of his. Say, am I not near the truth?"

How keenly Laodice was listening!

"Thou mayest be; but if so, I am all in the dark as to the intentions of Nemesius. It would be a sensible step for one situated as he is. Meanwhile his cousin, the Princess Vivia Cætani, has consented to preside and matronize his daughter while she remains in Rome."

"The Princess Vivia!" she screamed; "I thought her grief had made her as gloomy and

as immovable as Soracte itself. It was reported that, like the widow of Mausoleus, she had mixed her husband's ashes with water, and swallowed them. What an opportunity this visit will give her to shake off the grief which failed to kill her! She used to be a great beauty. Let me know the moment she comes, for I mean to renew my acquaintance with her."

He promised faithfully to do so, adding, urbanely: "She will be most delighted, I am sure."

Laodice had listened with strained ears to the conversation, not missing a word, although one of her lovers was whispering soft speeches to her all the time, and her spirits revived.

"Death only can baffle me now," she thought, while her eyes sparkled, smiles wreathed her full red lips, and she looked so darkly beautiful that the old Princess, her hand still upon Fabian's arm, said aside, gazing full at her:

"She'll ruin her beauty with those Eastern cosmetics; she's not in her first youth, and if it goes now, it is gone forever. I hate to go away from so delightful a conversationalist"—she had done all the talking herself—"I feared it was a lost art until I met thee, my Fabian; but my daughter is making signs over there for me to join her, and the crowding is really less. Farewell!"

She was tall and spare, and sidled through the press of people like a wedge; and Fabian, always amused at the follies of others, laughed

softly, and shortly afterwards retired from the scene.

A month later the Princess Vivia came, and the world, the other old Princess with it, called upon her, glad to renew its acquaintance with her; curious to see the daughter of Nemesius, of whose rare loveliness there had been much talk, and to inspect the magnificent interior of the old palace, the furniture of which, together with some of its finest works of art, had once belonged to the Cæsar from whom his wife had her descent.

The Princess Vivia, in dark robes that showed a flash of gold here and there, and were lit up with the precious antique jewels she wore in her hair and on her neck and arms, received all with courtesy tempered by sadness; for she would not have them think she had put aside her painful memories. Her long seclusion made her shrink, just at first, with almost timidity, from this sudden revival of the scenes of her vanished days, until she discovered that all who came were not absolute strangers, but persons whose faces were unforgotten, and who now claimed a renewal of old friendships. There were also others she had never seen before, who, with deferential manner and honeyed social phrases, courted her acquaintance, and impressed her favorably. She was surrounded by splendors which, by comparison, made her old villa on the Alban slopes seem like a barn; and gradually her nervousness disap-

peared, and she was conscious that her sense of enjoyment was by no means dead, only she must be discreet, and not let this be too apparent.

Claudia's heart did not warm towards the Princess Vivia, neither did its fine instincts repel her. The womanly nature of the Princess had been touched with genuine emotion by the pathos of the child's misfortune and her extreme loveliness, and she spared no kindness to win her affection; but, however well-meant her intentions, she failed, because she had none of that magnetism which attracts children, just as the fragrance of certain flowers attracts bees.

The blind child had Zilla with her; her father was often beside her, and this filled the measure of her happiness. She was gracious and sweet to every one. Her young friends, who had spent a happy week with her at the villa on the Aventine, came trooping around her to talk it all over, and ask a hundred questions about Grillo and the birds; and she, brave to endure, was apparently happy, even when every nerve was quivering under the oppressive personal contact with strangers, and the confused sounds of unfamiliar voices.

After every one in the patrician circles of Rome had called, invitations were issued by Nemesius to a grand supper \* in honor of the Princess, at which the Emperor signified his intention to be

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\*The principal meal of the Romans, corresponding with the late dinner of our times.

present, as a signal mark of honor to the commander of the Imperial Legion. It was an age of unexampled luxury and splendor, and the magnificence of the feast, the superb toilets and costly jewels of the guests, the softly-breathed strains of entrancing music, the numberless perfumed lamps which shed radiance over the scene, the air laden with the delicate fragrance of flowers, which were twined around the pillars, garlanded along the walls, and grouped among the gold and crystal vessels and ornaments of the tables, may be more easily imagined than depicted.

The central attraction of all, occupying the place which was his by right of his supreme rank, clothed in the purple and crowned with roses, was Valerian Emperor, who deputed himself as a demigod, whose power no mortal might question. Sating his appetite on the richest viands, quaffing the rarest wines, and receiving on every side the incense of adulation, did no prevision, dimly foreshadowing the future, thrill his inner consciousness? Where was his *dæmon*,\* that not the faintest whisper reached him of Sapor, the Persian? But what warning could make itself heard to the dull ears of one "drunk with the blood of the saints"?

The feast was over, and when, at the Emperor's request, Nemesius led his blind daughter,

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\*The Romans believed in attendant spirits called *dæmons*.

as fair and beautiful as a white lily in her spotless innocence, to Valerian's presence, he fixed his bold eyes upon her, intending to greet her with jest and flattery; but a sudden tremor, that thrilled his veins and paled his purple visage, checked his utterance. Those who observed this thought he was sick from over-eating; however, he quickly recovered, and, without even profaning the child's dimpled hand by a touch, or giving her the honor of an imperial kiss, he said a few confused words (meant to be pleasant) in deep, rumbling tones, which frightened her, then nodded to Nemesius to take her away, swearing by the gods that a mistake had been made in her creation.

Was it a sense of her pure innocence that disturbed Valerian? The near future will tell.

Laodice was among the Princess Vivia's first callers, and, with that worldly tact in which she was a perfect adept, and her graceful, deferential manners, she not only insinuated herself into her favor, but impressed her as being the most beautiful and charming woman she had yet seen in Rome. "How suitable a choice she would be for Nemesius or Fabian!" was a thought that always recurred to the Princess when under the spell of one of Laodice's charming visits. Like most women, Princess Vivia was by nature a match-maker, and she often wondered if she should be able to bring about an object upon which she was really beginning to set her heart.



Under the guise of careless gayety, delighting every one with his wit and his fascinating ways Fabian kept a falcon's eye on the movements of Laodice. Claudia was permitted to see her only in the presence of the Princess Vivian, and attended by Zilla, who, standing aloof, observed all that was passing. Nothing could be more winning than her pleasant ways and soft-voiced, caressing words to the blind child, but she made no allusion whatever to the chain and ruby amulet; while Claudia, inwardly shrinking, bore herself sweetly but irresponsively. This reserve, Laodice afterwards hinted to the Princess, was the effect of shyness, and the seclusion in which she had passed her childhood.

After several ceremonious visits, Laodice made the discovery that under the sombre memories of the past in which the widowed Princess draped herself, there lay a strong, womanly curiosity, which her dignity would not allow her to gratify by condescending to ask questions. "Any other woman," thought Laodice, "who had not mourned in seclusion the deepest sorrow that a true woman's heart can know, might gossip, and satisfy her longings to know everything that had been going on in the fashionable Roman world since her absence from it, but in her case it would be inconsistent, unbecoming, and—yes, almost vulgar; but if she heard incidentally all that she was pining to know, that would be quite another thing."

Laodice was enchanted with her discovery, and made her advances skilfully, to be sure of her ground; then, when assured that she was right, she grew bolder, and began by relating with deprecatory air, and expressions of pity for the erring—just as people do now—certain incidents of recent occurrence, by which one of the oldest and proudest families in Rome had been dishonored; they had tried to suppress the scandal, but somehow it leaked out, and society was aghast. This was the beginning, and it met with neither repulse nor actual encouragement from the Princess; only an incisive question now and then, and a keener expression in her eyes, betrayed the interest she felt in the story.

When Laodice rose to take leave, well content with her work, her hand was pressed, and she was invited to come again, not with the rest of the world, but as a friend, and at an hour when, being alone, the Princess, could more fully enjoy her society. From sunset to lamp-light she was quite solitary; she was conscious that so much brooding over the past was not good for her, and would Laodice not come and help her to dispel the shadows that cast their gloom over her spirit?

That is what she said, holding the hand of her guest clasped between both of her own. The promise was given with secret rapture; Laodice felt more deeply than she could express, she said in her low, sweet tones, the honor of being admitted to a more friendly intercourse with a lady

so illustrious for her virtues as the Princess Vivia, and she would be sure to avail herself of the privilege. And they separated, mutually satisfied in having gained an object.

To lose no time in the execution of her plan, Laodice set herself to work to procure reliable intelligence of the events and gossip of Roman society during the past decade, an easier task than may appear; for there were a number of noble old women surviving, whose highest pleasure in life was to find patient listeners to their reminiscences. To certain of these she assiduously devoted herself, and secured a rich fund of information, to be drawn on as needed. Her visits to the Princess increased in frequency, until not a day passed without their seeing each other. Laodice always came as the last guests were taking leave—and remained. After that no interruption was allowed; if a late visitor chanced to call, he was not admitted, the servants having been instructed that the Princess was on no account to be disturbed at that hour, which was supposed to be devoted to Memory.

In the last and smallest of the superb rooms, and shut off from them by rich silken draperies suspended between the pillars, the Princess Vivia and Laodice held their secret converse. One lofty casement, set in a deep embrasure, opened on an ivy-covered balcony, that extended the entire length of the wing, and commanded a view of far-away mountain heights against the

sapphire sky, temples enriched by Grecian art, and in the nearer distance a spacious plaza, in the centre of which stood a tall, spiral column surmounted by a statue of Horatius. The accessories of this retreat were perfect in selection and arrangement; and in all the palace there was no spot so admirably adapted to the purpose for which it was now required, where the peculiar intimacy and confidential intercourse which had sprung up between the Alban Princess and Laodice were like the performance of a secret function of the Bona Dea—one offering, while the other received the incense, without, as she imagined, compromising her dignity.

On a certain afternoon, near sunset, they met as usual; the hour was lovely, but neither of them felt its influence. From the high window cornice, pale lilac clusters of wistarias drooped, and green, feathery fringes of the scarlet-starred cypress flower waved gracefully to and fro in the summer breeze; the spray of the fountain in the court, touched by the last glow of the sun, looked like red wine; the column and statue of Horatius stood dark and clear-cut against the rose-tinted sky; bees lingered over their nectar in the white acacia blossoms; and swallows, wild with glee, darted through the air with merry and incessant chirpings—the only sound that accentuated the stillness, save the two low voices that drifted out through the open casement.

Within, a little aside from the casement, in

the shadow of the heavy curtain, to avoid a suspicious draft, the Princess reclined, hearing from Laodice the intricacies of an affair which, when it happened, had set most of the patrician families in Rome by the ears. The Princess was widowed soon after it began, but having retired to her villa, and taken up the *rôle* of Artemisia, she had never heard the end of it until now. Having been intimately acquainted with some of the persons concerned, her enjoyment may be imagined.

The light was fading out of the sky when the low, pleasant-toned voice of Laodice ceased; her story was done, and she rose to go; but, before taking leave, inquired after Claudia, adding:

"I am full of sympathy for the sweet child. I can not think of a greater misfortune than to be blind—to have all the beauty of earth and sky, and the faces of loved ones veiled, from the eyes by an impenetrable darkness, as in the case of this beautiful and unfortunate little creature!"

"It is most sad. I have not asked many questions, but is it true that she has been always blind?" said the Princess. "It may have been spoken of, but everything was so sudden about my coming here, that I do not quite remember."

"She has been blind from her birth, and it has thrown a shadow over the life of Nemesius. It is sad indeed," replied Laodice, turning from the casement, where she had stood an instant to inhale the delicious air. "Yet, stranger than

all," she added, "the unfortunate child does not comprehend—she does not know she is blind; never having seen, it has been possible to deceive her."

Then she went away, congratulating herself that she had advanced still farther into the good graces of the Princess, little dreaming that her words had been overheard, or by whom.

Claudia had been expecting her father; but, lured by the fragrant air, the silvery cadenzas of the fountain, the drowsy hum of the bees, and the quick, sweet chirp of the flitting swallows, she had stepped from the casement of her own apartment out on the ivy-clad balcony, to enjoy the sounds which reminded her of her home on the Aventine. She moved along with slow, lingering steps, breathing in all the sweetness; then stood, her face uplifted, her lips parted with a smile, one dimpled hand nestling among the ivy leaves that covered the marble balustrade, her heart filled with a sense of the beauty she could not see, when suddenly, in tones clear and distinct, she heard a voice somewhere near her saying: "She has been blind from her birth, and it has thrown a shadow over the life of Nemesius.

. . . The unfortunate child does not comprehend—she does not know she is blind; never having seen, it has been possible to deceive her."

The words came through an open casement, near which, unconsciously to herself, Claudia was standing; they at once arrested and concen-

trated her attention; she would not have listened voluntarily to words not intended for her ears, but these smote her like blows, and benumbed her power of motion, while her face grew as white as the tall Roman lilies in the vase beside her; for she knew that she was the "unfortunate child" the voice alluded to, and now was made plain to her the mystery which had so long troubled her mind with questions that every one evaded. "To be blind means darkness—always darkness; but I could bear that, since it has been always so, if it did not grieve thee, my father!" she murmured. Yes: that was the bitter thought which, like a sharp thorn, penetrated the poor little aching heart.

For several minutes Claudia stood there motionless; no other words reached her from within, for the one whose voice she had heard was gone; the music of the fountain and the wild chirping of the swallows were no longer heeded, for every sense was introverted and centered in the thought: "I am blind, and *his* heart is sore, and his life shadowed by it. I thought the gods were kind, but why have they been so cruel to me?"

## CHAPTER XI.

## A DAY AT THE VILLA.

WITH her hand nestling among the ivy leaves, her sightless eyes gazing blankly upward, the smile frozen on her pale lips, Claudia stood motionless on the spot where, as if out of the air, the voice which had dispelled the vague mystery of her life had reached her. She had comprehended with swift intuition that her blindness was what had so often oppressed and disturbed her, and that the seal of its darkness would never be removed from her eyes. She remembered many incidents which, at the time of their occurrence, had seemed strange—among them the visit of Ben Asa, the Jew, and how tenderly he had touched her eyes, and soothed their pain with some precious ointment; and also how the questions which from time to time agitated her mind, had always been evaded by answers that had only silenced without satisfying her. Her heart cried out against it. Why had they not told her? Why, out of tenderness, had they deceived her? Why had she been born only to bring sorrow to her father, for the love of whom she would lay down her life?

While these and other thoughts were passing



through her mind, the tender, radiant tints of palest green, of faintly-blushing rose, of delicate purples fringed with gold, faded out of the sky; the swallows fluttered into their nests; the bees sought the shelter of their hives; the gray, restful shadows of twilight brought a momentary lull to the unquiet, tired world. The silvery music of the great fountain below pulsed through the silence, but it was all unheeded; even the chill that now touched the air, and the dew glistening among the strands of her golden hair, were unfelt.

“Claudia!” called Nemesisus, as he stepped out on the balcony, and peered through the shadows. He had come in, and gone through the rooms looking for the child; but, seeing the casement thrown open, and knowing how she loved to be in the open air, he concluded that, lured by the beauty of the evening, she had gone out on the balcony—“Claudia! where art thou hidden?”

It was the voice she loved, and it reached her heart through the torpor that, like a sudden blight, had fallen upon her young life. Nemesisus, seeing the faint gleam of her white-robed figure as she came slowly out of the shadows towards him, went to meet her. Her hands were held out before her, as if she was groping her way; the graceful elasticity of her step was gone, and her movements were timid. Conscious of the darkness that wrapped her life, she was

afraid. He grasped her hands: they were like ice; and when father and child reached the light that streamed through the casement, he saw that her face not only looked like marble, but wore a strange, frightened expression.

"How wrong of thee, oh, my sweet child! to stay out so long in the night air and dew! Thy pretty curls are quite damp," he said, passing his hand caressingly over her head as he led her through the casement. "I fear thou art ill. Why dost thou look so strange and troubled? Repose here, little one, until I fetch thee some wine."

"My father," she said, gently restraining him, "I have something to tell thee. Sit here close by me; put thy arm around me, and let me lean my head upon thy breast. Oh, my own father! I wished for nothing but to love thee and make thee happy, and I have cost thee only sorrow!"

"Thou!—what sorrow hast thou cost me, my innocent dove? Who or what has put such unreal fancies into thy head? Thou art the sole happiness of my life. How, then, art thou my sorrow?" exclaimed Nemesius, fearing that the moment so long dreaded had at last come.

"I know thy love, my father; but the voice said: 'She has been blind from her birth, and it has cast a shadow over the life of Nemesius.' *Then I knew!*" she said, softly.

"The voice?—whose voice?" he asked, in low tones, striving to hold in check the wild storm

of emotion that wrung his heart, lest finding vent it should frighten her.

"I heard only the words, and they answered the strange thoughts that have so often troubled me. I knew—oh, so well!—that there was something; but Zilla, out of tenderness, would never tell me what it was. She did not know all that was in my mind, and how I wondered when she would tell me of the brightness, the color, and beauty of things, whose forms I knew only by the touch of my fingers. I asked her what was light, and she said it was the smile of the gods. I asked how the poets knew of the light of the sky and the stars, and of the blue sea, and the white-sailed vessels; and she said they dreamed of them, and turned them into verses and songs. But I wondered how it could be; and when she told me that I too would have such dreams when I grew older, I waited; but I know now—I am blind."

"But why let it grieve thee, my gentle one? Nothing is changed, and we have been very happy together. Am I not with thee, and are not all the enjoyments thou hast ever known still at thy command?" he asked, striving to comfort her, though at a loss how to do so.

"But the voice said it made thy life sorrowful. How can I be happy, knowing that I have brought thee only sorrow?" she urged, in the same soft, tremulous tones.

The calm which always dwells on the coun-

tenances of the blind, and which had imparted such ineffable loveliness to hers, was swept from it now by the agitated shadows of her strange sorrow, just as a stone when dropped into a clear pool breaks its surface into gray, meaningless ripples, which efface the beautiful images of sky and shore so lately pictured upon it.

"The gods bear me witness that my sorrow was for thee, my loved one, without a thought of self," he said, pressing her head closer to her heart. "I tell thee again that life holds no object so dear to me as thyself; without thee, all would be joyless."

"And yet thou art not blind: thou canst see all that is most beautiful."

"I see thy dear face, my child; all else is nothing to me, while I see and have thee."

"But I can never see thee, my own father," she murmured, in tones of indescribable sadness.

The man's inmost spirit was shaken, and tears—such tears as can be wrung only from the depths of a strong, noble nature—quenched the angry fire kindled in his eyes by the pain inflicted on his blind, helpless one. Fate had mastered him, leaving no remedy; he only said:

"Perhaps thou wouldst not love me as now, didst thou see me."

"Why should I not? Oh, my father! nothing, nothing could change that to me which I know and love without seeing—the real, true one!" she exclaimed, smoothing his face. "But the

world is very beautiful; all should be happy who can look upon its brightness."

"It is not all brightness, nor always beautiful, my child," answered Nemesis; "there come storms and tempests that darken and rend it; there are sights which turn the blood cold to see—cruel, horrible spectacles; there are people whose evil faces make one afraid. Oh, one has need to turn his back, or close his eyes, or wish himself blind, to avoid seeing the sickening evils that meet one at every turn! No, all is not bright and beautiful—"

"The gods be thanked! I have at last found thee!" interrupted Zilla, who entered hastily, her face lighting up with sudden joy when she saw Claudia quietly reclining on her father's breast. "I have been so alarmed"—turning to Nemesis—"I left her only a moment, to fetch a light mantle to throw around her, if the evening grew chill, and when I came back she was gone. I looked through the room, and, not finding her, went to ask the Pridcess Vivia's woman if she had seen her, but she had not; then I feared she had wandered into some of the long corridors, and got lost among the great rooms; and I flew up and down, hoping every instant to see her, but found no trace—no one had met her; then I thought of the balcony, and ran back. Oh, dear one, where wert thou hiding?"

"She was on the balcony, at the farther end," answered Nemesis, with a look so stern and

sorrowful that the woman started, and, gazing from him to the child, noticed for the first time the change in her countenance, and its marble paleness.

"What has happened? O Nemesis! why is she so white and still?"

"Thy tender efforts to keep her in ignorance of her misfortune have not availed: she knows all," was the low, quiet reply.

"Hadst thou told me from the first, I should have got used to it in time; thou didst love me too well, good mother. But do not grieve thyself," said the child, gently.

"Forgive me!—forgive what was done through love! I but sought to shield thy young life from a sorrow that seemed needless," cried Zilla, kneeling before her; and as Nemesis arose, unable to bear the strain any longer, she folded her arms around the child.

"I know," said Claudia, laying her head on Zilla's shoulder, with a weary sigh that was almost a sob.

Nemesis went out on the balcony, leaving them together; he was nearly suffocated by suppressed emotions. Angry surprise, bitter grief, and a passionate desire to strike to death whoever it was that, through malice or accident, had brought this sudden sorrow to his blind child, beat together in wild tumult against his breast, and sent the blood mounting to his brain like fire. He cursed life, he cursed the gods, he

cursed fate. The cool night wind fanned his heated forehead, and, relieved by giving vent to his emotions, the first fury of his passion began to subside; the purple darkness, through which the fountain whispered, insensibly soothed him to a calmer mood, until only his grief was left to wrestle with. He remembered where she was standing when he came out on the balcony to look for her; he walked to the spot, and the mystery was explained by the fact that it was nearly in front of the casement of the room into which the Princess Vivia usually retired after her visitors had gone.

"Doubtless," he conjectured, "the Princess had invited a friend to remain with her after her reception, for the purpose of enjoying a quiet chat, in the course of which, and naturally enough, my Claudia's blindness was referred to in the words which malign fate wafted to her ears—words sympathetic and harmless in themselves, but quite the reverse in their effect upon her sensitive heart."

That is the way he formulated the possibilities, and that was how the accident had really happened; but he did not dream who the speaker was, nor how wickedly she would have exulted had she known how well her words had sped. What, then, was to be done? He could do nothing. Should he speak to the Princess? She was not to blame for chance words spoken by a guest, which had produced results wide of their

intention. Why, then, make her uncomfortable? Plainly there was nothing to be done, and he resolved not to speak of the occurrence except to Fabian; then, concealing their own grief, they would help the child as best they could to bear the inevitable with courage.

Nemesius walked up and down the long balcony. The ceaseless echo of multitudes tramping up and down Rome's four hundred spacious streets, intent on business and pleasure; the din of traffic, the ceaseless roll of wagons and chariots over the stone flags, and the dull, confused uproar attendant on a centre where nearly two millions of human beings were congregated—all had sunk into comparative silence; for the day, with its individual struggles, its crimes, its tears, its triumphs, its crucial tests, was buried in night, leaving only ghosts behind.

Now and then the tramp of soldiers relieving guard, scraps of a lover's song under a distant *loggia*, the silvery notes of a mandolin, echoes of laughter and jest from passing groups of young patricians intent on pleasure, were the only sounds heard in this neighborhood of stately palaces and storied temples; and presently these also drifted away, and absolute silence reigned. Suddenly a wild, savage roar reverberated on the air like thunder.

Nemesius started, and threw back his head to listen; then he remembered that some fierce lions from the Libyan Desert, which had arrived that



day at the gate of the Via Latina, outside the walls, were to be drawn in their iron-barred cages, at night, to the dens of the Flavian Amphitheatre. He knew that the ferocious beasts were for the arena, and was well aware of the purpose for which they were to be used; but why should a dull, sickening horror creep along his veins when another hoarse roar, louder because nearer than the first, tore through the night? Would not these savage, tawny animals avenge the honor of the gods by the destruction of those enemies—the Christians—who threatened their overthrow, derided their sanctity, and defied their power?

“I am not myself to-night,” said Nemesus, as he re-entered the room where he had left Claudia in Zilla’s arms.

He found them still there—the woman’s face like marble, her eyes aglow with angry fire; the child reclining on the pillows of a couch, her blind eyes shaded by the dark fringes of their half-closed lids; her hands like lilies, folded listlessly together on her breast.

“Not asleep yet, my dear one?” he asked, as, hearing his footsteps, she quickly raised her head.

“I was waiting for thee; I could not sleep without the good-night kiss,” she said, holding up her hands to caress his face as he bent over her. “And I wanted to tell thee, my father,” she whispered, “that I have been thinking—oh, so

much!—and that I mean to be brave; for a great Roman soldier's daughter should have courage; and then, when I get used to knowing that I can not look out of my eyes as others do, because they are darkened, I shall not mind it so very much; and for the love of thee, and with thee always near me, why should I not be happy?"

Nature had given the child strong powers of inductive reasoning; her faculties of thought, introverted and concentrated by her obscured vision, and cultivated by her daily and hourly association with a matured and intelligent mind like Zilla's, gave her a habit of reflecting and speaking in a manner unusual to children of her age.

"Why, indeed, sweet one?" he answered, caressing her; held almost speechless by her words.

"I should like to see, if only to see thee," she continued; "that would be enough. But I know it can never be," she added, with a little, tremulous sigh. "I am glad to know just how it is. The voice said no harm, but only the truth. I must have known some day. And Zilla says that Homer, the great poet, whose verses she reads to me, and which I love to listen to, was blind; and I think it was worse for him than for me, because he had the grief of losing that which I never possessed. That must be very hard."

"Yes, my gentle one, it is best that thou shouldst know; I see it now, although I would have guarded thee from it forever had it been

possible. I did not know how strong and brave and wise thou art, or I should not have been in such dread of the truth being discovered to thee, but would have broken it to thee myself. Now kiss me, my daughter; it is late—too late for a young bird like thee to be out of its nest. In the morning I will breakfast with thee, and then we will go and spend the day at the villa.”

“Oh, what happiness!” she exclaimed, while a smile dimpled her face; “how lovely it will be! Zilla, didst thou hear? To-morrow we go home to spend the whole day—the whole, happy day!”

And so they parted,—Nemesius to try and forget the new pang added to his sorrow, and Claudia to fall asleep and dream of the happiness that the morrow would bring.

The Princess Vivian did not accompany them to the villa; she had an engagement with Laodice to drive, by way of the superb arched bridge just completed across the Tiber, to visit Cæsar’s Gardens, where some fine ruins stood against the sky, and where beautiful things ran riot in such a wild luxuriance of neglect, that nature had almost reclaimed her heritage from art.

Fabian called early at the palace with flowers for Claudia, only to learn that, accompanied by her father and nurse, she had started at sunrise for the villa on the Aventine. It was the very weather for such an expedition. The man pined to get out of the great, noisy city; to satisfy his desire, and at the same time enjoy the felicity of

spending the day with Nemesius and Claudia, was an opportunity certainly presented by the gods, and must not be neglected.

Returning to his house, Fabian ordered his horse, and lost no time in making his way to the villa. He walked the animal leisurely up the chestnut avenue, enjoying the refreshing shade and the perfumed air; then on to the portico; but saw no one until, looking around, he observed Zilla sitting alone weaving garlands under a wide-spreading acacia tree, whose blossoms, gently stirred by the wind, scattered their white, fragrant petals upon her like snowflakes. She was lost in thought, and did not observe Fabian's presence until he was quite near her; then his shadow falling across her flowers made her look quickly up, and he instantly saw something in the expression of her face which arrested his attention.

"I salute thee," he said, in his kind courteous way; "but why alone? Our little lady is well, I hope?"

"She is well. She is with her father—mounted on Grillo—somewhere in the gardens."

"She is happy to be here once again, but I doubt if it will make her better satisfied with Rome. What has happened, Zilla?" he asked quietly, observing that her eyes, always sad, now wore a stern, troubled expression.

"She knows all. By a most unfortunate accident she has learned that she is blind," was the low-voiced reply.

An energetic malediction, and a fierce invocation to the Furies to devour the one who had destroyed the peaceful illusion of the child's life, escaped Fabian's lips; the hot, passionate blood of the South asserted itself, surprising his usual self-command into a momentary surrender. Then he would hear all, and by the time she had finished telling him how it had happened, his passion had subsided.

"It was plainly an accident, but, by the gods! a most unfortunate one!" was his comment.

"It may be so; I am not sure," she answered.

"May I hear thy reasons, or the facts?"

"I have spoken to the commander Nemesius," she replied, with reserve.

Fabian's face flushed; in questioning her, he had for once forgotten himself; but various motives and quick suspicions, no less than his love for the blind child, had urged him. He turned away into the avenue, that led by many a bosky turn and flower-draped alley to the cascade, where he presently found them—Claudia throned on the back of Grillo, who was contentedly cropping a feast of violets and grass; Nemesius seated on a moss-grown rock near by, cheerful words upon his lips, but a shadow of sorrow in his face, as he gazed into his child's sightless eyes.

Fabian kissed her hand, greeted Nemesius, then with high-sounding words saluted Grillo, which made Claudia laugh, as he intended; then,

as usual, he won her to a merry mood by his absurd extravagances of speech, and the ridiculous things he related, until even the grave commander, accustomed as he was to his kinsman's versatile peculiarities, wondered while he smiled.

"Fabian," she said, suddenly breaking in between something that he had finished telling, and another story that his lips were open to begin, "I have something to tell thee."

"Of Grillo? Has he been misbehaving? or have the doves been fighting?" he laughingly asked, but knowing full well what was coming.

"I am blind, Fabian," she said, quietly.

"So am I, by the gods!—stone blind; but I have not three pairs of eyes to see for me, and look after my ways, as thou hast," he quickly answered.

"O Fabian!—blind? How can that be? Is it dark?"

"As Erebus, except when things as horrible as Chimeras, Furies, and the Harpies are to be met with; then I see, when it is the wish of my soul to be blind," said the artful Fabian.

"O Fabian! is it true?"

"As true as life! Thank the gods, beautiful one, that sights like these can never blast thy eyes"—a day came when Fabian thought of his foolish words—"And dost thou know, sweetest little lady," he went on, "that I am perishing for some honey-cakes and a draught of wine? And, *per Bacco*, Grillo's ears threaten a laugh!"

"Let us go, my father; poor Fabian has had no breakfast," she said, sweetly. "But, Grillo, thou must not laugh; it frightens me."

Fabian had breakfasted, but he wanted to talk with Nemeseius; his heart was full, and the sparkle of his nonsense was flickering.

After the light repast, which he made a pretense of eating, jesting the while, and inventing pretty myths to amuse Claudia, she went away with Zilla to the dove-cote, and he was left alone with Nemeseius, who, after relating what had happened, said:

"Zilla firmly believes that the words heard by the child on the balcony, did not reach her ears by accident; for, having gone to the Princess Vivia's apartment, hoping to find Claudia there, the door suddenly opened as she approached, and Laodice came out. She thinks that Laodice caught sight of the child through the open casement, and intended that what she said should be heard by her. For some unexplained reason, Zilla hates Laodice."

"I can not see what end Laodice could serve by acting as Zilla suspects. If she could thereby have advanced any special design, she would not have hesitated a moment to consider consequences. Under all the indolent softness of her beauty, she has a cruel nature; still, in this case I think Zilla misjudges her," observed Fabian. "Thou hast told me of the sweet child's courage—worthy of the blood that flows in her veins—but hast thou noted any change?"

"Yes, my Fabian. I observed to-day something which convinces me that in the realization of her misfortune she has yet to find her worst pain. After we reached the villa this morning, we came in here, that she might rest while Grillo was being caparisoned for her. She has always moved fearlessly about the atrium, so familiar is she with every part of it; but to-day she seemed at fault and uncertain as to her way, holding out her hand before her as she stepped timidly here and there, while a look of apprehension shadowed her countenance. I watched her closely as she groped about, then took her trembling hand, and she said, trying to laugh: 'I am a little coward, after all: I was afraid.' 'Afraid! Why afraid, my child?' I asked. 'It is so dark,' she answered. Then I knew that she was, for the first time, conscious of the darkness, which no glimmer of light can penetrate. How will she bear it?" asked Nemesius, his stern, sad face overspread with gloom. "Something must be done to divert and occupy her mind; and in a few days I shall take her away to the sea—to Salernum and Capreæ — and return here in August; I know she will be happier here," he added.

"Nothing could be better. I have great faith in the remedial powers of the salt air," said Fabian, strangely touched by what he had just heard. "We can do nothing, but must try our best to make her happy; and do thou, my Ne-



mesius, be the first to appear cheerful under this blow of Fate. If she suspects thy sorrow, her sensitive heart will divine the cause, and results will follow that will pass all human efforts to undo. Will the Princess Vivian accompany us?—for I too wish to visit Salernum and Capreae for my health,” continued Fabian, resuming his usual tone.

“I shall invite her. To know of thy intention to join us has already lightened the weight on my mind. I cannot thank thee sufficiently, my Fabian,” said Nemesius.

“Am I not seeking my own pleasure by going? Thou wilt yet find out what a selfish egotist I am,” replied Fabian, smiling.

“But I have something to tell thee which may either amuse or anger thee; only let it be understood that I will not be questioned. I have discovered that Laodice has captivated our Princess, who receives her daily on terms of most friendly intimacy; and the Bona Dea herself presides over their secret conference. But the Princess is the most guileless of women, and when she thinks herself most impenetrable then she becomes transparent, betraying, in the most amusing way, all she would conceal. She has given me to understand that we should both marry—thou for Claudia’s sake, I for my own.”

“I hope she will leave me out of the question,” said Nemesius, his dark face in a glow of indignation.

"She won't, I assure thee. The toils are being woven; the Bona Dea's aid is invoked, and sacrifices not spared upon her altars. Thou art the first choice, and Laodice is to be the bride of thy destiny! Neither thou nor I can match two women single-handed,—one of them simple and obstinate, the other as wily as a serpent. I can only suggest one remedy. Let the Princess go back to her vineyards and peasants on the Alban slope; do not press her to prolong her stay if she proposes going home—for as surely as thou dost, there will be no escape for thee."

"Fabian, if I did not know thee to be full of eccentric fancies, and possessed of a prolific imagination, I should fear thy brain was slightly turned. The gods have no such evil fortune in store for me as that of which thou speakest. I must beg thee by our life-long friendship never to refer again to the possibility of a second espousal for me," said Nemesius, gravely.

"I braved thy displeasure, presuming on thy affection, my Achates; but let me finish, as the rest concerns myself," said the irrepressible Fabian. "Having disposed of thee, I am destined to a maturer fate—no less, believe me, than to espouse the Princess Vivian!"

His gravity overset by this unexpected climax, Nemesius laughed as he had not done for years, which warmed Fabian's heart to the core.

"I have still other news," he went on. "It is rumored this morning that the rich edile, Æmi-

lianus, has liberated his three hundred slaves, and that the Christian Pope, Stephen by name, has been tracked."

Fabian knew that, as a Roman citizen, the edile had a right to dispose of his slaves as he saw fit; as his property, he had absolute power to work his will upon them, whether it was to slay or liberate; but while it was not an unusual occurrence for a master to torture and destroy his slaves, he seldom gave them freedom, unless—he became a Christian. It was this which attached significance to the event just related.

"So I have been informed," answered Nemesius. "Such occurrences are becoming frequent, and have but one meaning. As to the Pope, there's a wide difference between tracking and catching him, so long as he has a subterranean kingdom, whose secret ways are known only to the initiated, in which to conceal himself. Besides that, he has thousands of followers in every class of life—in the palace of Valerian, in the meanest huts on the Campagna, in the highest ranks of the army, as well as among the inferior soldiery, in the Senate, the Forum, the magistracy—all of whom watch over his safety, and warn him of approaching danger. We know all about the vast system of sand-pits which honeycomb the Campagna, into which entrance is gained through pozzuolana caves, found under the weed-grown hillocks in every direction; but it is only the Christians who hold the clue to

their mysterious labyrinths, and none else can be found, however fearless they may be, brave enough to venture into those unexplored galleries, whose intricate tortuous windings bewilder and shut off all hope of return.

“Ever since the days of Nero, the Christians have found refuge and concealment in these dismal abodes, whenever for the good of the State an edict of extermination has been issued against them; the clue to which, transmitted by their traditions from one generation to another, provides them with a place of safety, where they practice the unholy rites of their false religion, hatch treason, and where numbers of them live, die and are deposited in the countless columbaria provided for them. This is the eighth attempt made by Rome to destroy the conspirators against her gods and her empire; and now, as in former times, these old places of refuge swarm with them. To a thoughtful mind, this underground world affords a symbol, I sometimes fear, of how the Roman power, invincible to open foes, is being undermined by the despised followers of the *Christus*, unless by a supreme effort we can exterminate them.”

“There is no lack of such auguries, I have been informed,” answered Fabian, dryly. “Time only can solve questions which to the present are inscrutable.”

“Let us go into the air,” said Nemesius, as he offered a libation in honor of the gods, and stood

a moment silent; Fabian did the same, then they left the *atrium* and went down into the beautiful gardens in search of Claudia. They found her with Zilla under the ilex trees, near the Grotto of Silenus; she had Zilla's lute, and was touching the strings, trying to form the musical notes into an air, which evaded her just when she thought she had caught it. It was like chasing a butterfly, and almost as alluring. She heard their footsteps, but did not lay aside the lute, and when her father and Fabian stopped near her, she said in her sweet, childish way:

"I am learning to play, and when I know how it will not seem so dark."

## CHAPTER XII

## THE CAMPAGNA AND ITS GHOSTS—PAGAN CHIVALRY AND PAGAN FANATICISM.

THE dawn crept sleepily up the Sabine mountains, on whose snow-capped peaks the last pale stars looked down. The picturesque outlines of the Alban hills, with their richly wooded slopes and treasures of unsurpassed beauty, were still blurred and darkened by the lingering shadows of night. The massive arches of the great aqueducts, stretching along the Agro Romano, added to the solemnity of the scene wherever the grandeur of their proportions, which projected still deeper shadows into the dimness beyond, could be discerned. The hooting of an owl from an old ivy-covered tomb accented the silence; the wind swept with a low, plaintive sound through the feathery grasses, and echoed like a sigh through the pines, which reared their golden stems near by.

Everything looked ghostly, indefinable, shadowy; and when an armor-clad man, mounted on a powerful horse, emerged out of the near misty gloom, as if out of the air, they seemed the most unreal of all. The brute's hoofs made no sound on the soft, grass-grown earth; and his rider,

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motionless and silent, was content to let him choose his own gait until, having reached one of the great arches of the Anio Novus,\* he drew rein. The halt was needed by both, the journey from which they were returning having been long and rugged.

The rider was Nemesius, on his way back from an old fortress that commanded an important pass in the Sabine range, and which was garrisoned by two companies of his own veterans. News had been brought to him of a threatened mutiny, and, after reporting to the Emperor, he had at once mounted, and proceeded with reinforcements to the scene. The sight of the old commander, under whom the soldiers had won their laurels in Gaul, aroused their spirit of military obedience, which inaction, and the long absence of their leader, had relaxed. The sight of his flashing eyes, his ringing words which recalled the victories of the past, excited their enthusiasm and reawakened their loyalty. However, two of the ring-leaders, a German and a Briton, remained for a time obstinately sullen and defiant; but the stern military law of that day, which required swift execution, removed the last obstacle to the re-

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\* Of the two aqueducts referred to—the Claudian and the Anio Novus—the latter was by far the grandest, some of its arches reaching a height of a hundred and twenty feet, while its length, from the walls of Rome to the bosom of the mountain whose springs supplied it, was sixty miles.

storation of discipline; and the commander, well satisfied with the result, after distributing his reinforcements among the recently disaffected garrison, felt at liberty to depart. He accepted an escort as far as the Campagna, then dismissed it, and proceeded alone.

For some time past, the never too friendly relations between Rome and Persia were becoming more strained; there existed between the two nations a spirit of smouldering defiance, which at any moment was likely to break out in open hostilities. Conscious of this, and not averse to the issue, Valerian prepared for it by a vigorous reorganization of his armies, a strengthening of the Roman defences far and near; and, to propitiate the gods, he issued more severe and unmerciful edicts against the Christians than any that had yet emanated from his malign soul.

This is how it happened that Nemesius was released from many of those secret duties which for some time past had been imposed on him by the Emperor—duties which only his loyalty had made endurable; and the reason why he was restored to the more congenial and ennobling exercise of his military functions; and it will also explain why he is waiting there alone, among the shadows of the Campagna, at an hour when only the unblest things of earth and air are supposed to be abroad. But no superstitious fears disturbed his mind; the indistinguishable,



gloomy dimness around him, and the silence were in accordance with his feelings; for his thoughts still dwelt on the haunting sorrow of his life—the blindness of his child.

Suddenly he became conscious that living objects were moving with stealthy steps somewhere near him; perhaps the sound proceeded from some wild creature, creeping home to its covert in a tufa cave or ancient tomb. It was now retreating—not one, but several footsteps, which his keen ear discerned as surely human. Holding his breath, his hand grasping his sword, his head leaning forward, he listened to assure himself of the direction they were taking, then followed the sounds slowly and noiselessly, until, having crossed under the wide arch, he halted on the opposite side, and cast a penetrating glance around him. Through the gray mist, he saw, a short distance in advance of him, several tall figures shrouded in dark cloaks, the hoods of which enveloped their heads—figures which seemed to glide in swift unison towards some object, which he could not discern. Their forms were dimly outlined, and, only that they were darker, they would have seemed part of the misty shadowiness which surrounded them.

Nemesius was at first startled; he wondered if they could be shades of the departed, who, finding no rest in the realms of the dead, had returned to earth in the vain quest of repose. Keeping his eye fixed on the receding forms, he

rode towards them. A ruined tomb intercepted his view for an instant, and when he passed it, they had disappeared as completely as if the earth had suddenly opened and swallowed them. He galloped to the spot, but saw no trace of them, nor clue of how they had escaped. Were they, indeed, shades from Plutonian realms? There were one or two pozzuolana pits, an ancient travertine quarry, and the ruined tomb, all overgrown with brambles, hanging vetches, and interlacing vines. That was all. A cow lay among the lush grass, lazily chewing her cud, and turned her great, sleepy eyes with supreme indifference upon Nemesius; a white goat, perched on a fragment of ruined wall, fixed his slanting, amber eyes on his, and with twitching nostrils seemed to ask the object of his intrusion.

A moment's reflection, however, seemed to explain the mysterious occurrence. Nemesius felt assured that those he had seen were Christians, going into the catacombs to assist at the secret functions of their banned and outlawed faith. Did not the quarries of tufa and travertine, and the pozzuolana caves, which had been worked from the remotest times to supply Rome and the neighboring cities with building material, give access to the ancient sand-pits, with which the whole extent of the Agro Romano had been pierced for the same purpose? Was it not known that in these subterranean labyrinths, criminals, assassins, robbers, and political offenders, had in

former times found refuge from avenging justice, and safety from pursuit? And had not even Emperors here concealed themselves from the swift vengeance of insurrections? Had not the first great persecution of over two centuries before, under the edicts of Nero, opened the secret ways of these retreats to the hunted followers of the *Christus*, who survived the rack, the flame, and the sword: and to their dead, who, having sealed their faith with their blood, and won their palms, were deposited here in peace?

From that early time the key to these intricate, winding galleries, these mysterious chambers and most secret retreats, had been known to the Christian priesthood, and transmitted—a sacred trust—to those who came after them. And now in this fresh persecution, under Valerian, new generations of the despised sect, defying the gods as their predecessors had done, found safety in these wide-spreading, subterranean cities of refuge, where no man, however brave he might be, unacquainted with their mysterious net-work, would dare venture in pursuit.

Nemesius knew that in seven great persecutions since that of Nero, although hundreds of thousands of Christians had been put to death, the sect was not extinct; their numbers not lessened, but increased; their strong faith in the *Christus* of their worship not diminished, but strengthened. To what principle was to be attributed such deathless faith? What mighty

dæmon, at enmity with the gods, helped them to defy and endure torture and death under its most frightful aspects, rather than compromise their faith by the faintest sign, or a whispered word—even by so small a thing as casting a single grain of incense into a brazier—although by so doing they would have purchased life, freedom, honors, and riches? Nemesis had witnessed these things with his own eyes; he called them acts of supreme but misdirected heroism, not discerning their supernatural incentive, or the grave questions which involuntarily arose in his mind after the soul-harrowing spectacles were over.

The brave commander of the Imperial Legion had heard strange stories of the mysterious excavations under the Campagna, which, ever since he could remember, had been a subject of interest to historians, scholars, statisticians, and poets, while imagination had run riot in weaving legends and fables which cast a wilder glamour over them; but, after all, actual discovery had never reached beyond a limited knowledge of their outskirts. His most extravagant conceptions had failed to grasp an idea of what has since been revealed to modern science, which has not even yet, after fifteen hundred years, penetrated the full extent of this vast subterranean city, "in whose black tunnelled streets," says Story, "lie entombed a mighty population of the dead; where tier upon tier, story above story, for miles and miles along these silent ave-

nues, repose the skeletons of persecuted and martyred Christians, each with his lachrymatory, now dry, and his little lamp, which went out in darkness." \*

With only a vague knowledge of this vast underground kingdom of the dead, and also of the living, in times of persecution like the present one under Valerian, is it strange that Nemesius should have thought of it as symbolic of a seemingly indestructible principle, which was undermining the empire of the gods and of Rome?

Not so strange, in the economy of human events, as to see how Almighty God prepared, by the hands of the heathen themselves, this refuge for His Church in the times of her tribulation, and graves for her martyred children, who enriched His harvests with their blood, whose testimony made sure the foundations of His city, whose palms are its glory, and whose bodies are its sacred treasure.

Not so wonderful as that Rome, throned on her seven hills, the very abomination of desolation, treading out the blood of the saints in the

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\* How few, comparatively speaking, of these catacombs have yet been explored! But it is supposed they extend as far as Ostia. Northcote tells us that "the united length of all the streets in the Cemetery of St. Agnes alone would be fifteen or sixteen miles," and reckons the length of all the streets in all the catacombs at not less than nine hundred miles. According to Father Machi's calculations, the Roman catacombs contain nearly seven million tombs.

wine-press of her vengeance, should, to her own shame and their glory, have preserved with jealous care faithful records of their testimony for Christ; and that at last, humbled to the dust, she should become the heritage of the Cross.

As Nemeseius proceeded slowly towards the city, his mind occupied with grave conjectures, morning blushed against the snowy crests of the Sabine heights; the gossamer mists, rising slowly from the plain, caught the glow, and floated on to scatter roses before the advancing day. There was a sudden gleam, then a flood of radiance swept down the wooded slopes, dispersing the last purple shadows, burnishing the trees with gold, steeping the whole Campagna—its farm-lands, its villages, its pastures of billowy green, its stately villas, its fields of grain ripening for the harvest, its countless herds, the noble aqueducts, the groves of orange and olive—in a great tide of golden light, which, swiftly spreading, cast the benison of its glory across to the blue dancing waters of the sea.

Between the far-stretching purple shadows cast by the aqueducts, as the light streamed through their lofty arches, scarlet poppies, yellow *cistus*, and pink-frilled daisies, made oases of rich and varied hues. The wild flowering vines that clambered up the ancient ruins that were to be seen here and there, the flaunting gorses and wall-flowers which had found a home for themselves high up between the travertine

blocks of the aqueducts, over whose mighty arches ivies were already weaving their emerald' net-work, brightened and glistened and smiled in the light just risen out of darkness; while above all the blue air was musical with the fluting of larks, and the softer warble of thrushes.

All the wide, beautiful spaces over the Agro Romano, as far the eye could reach, were astir with life. Thousands of sheep followed the piping shepherds to rich pasturage, looking like great snowdrifts among the green; buffaloes, surly, savage-looking beasts, with short legs, curled horns, and shaggy coats, patiently browsed while waiting to begin their dreary work of hauling enormous loads; wide-horned, gray oxen bowed their necks to the yoke, and to the wild songs of the Campagna, as old as the hills which embraced it; *butteros*, with long poles in hand, had an active task to keep the wild colts, of which they had charge, from straying beyond reach of all efforts to catch them, even by the help of the lassos they carried.

Gay bands of peasants, driving donkeys laden with panniers of fruit, vegetables, and other marketable things, were hurrying, with song and jest, towards the city gates, their wares covered with flowers, as was every step of the way under their feet; and now and then a squad of mounted soldiers swept by, intent on some military errand that brooked no delay. Under all this brightness and beauty of blue skies and

golden sheen, lay the dead cities of Latium; and under them the cities of the silent, waiting dead.

The Campagna of to-day, over which a dreamy loveliness broods; where deadly miasms lurk amid its vine-clad ruins and blooming wastes; where the beautiful hills, unchanged, still guard its borders; where the sea along its coast crowns the departed glory with a pale aureole of light; where the Roman sunshine pours its gold, and broiders it in arabesques of purple and green and crimson, and where its unforgotten past holds the mind in thrall as under a spell—is not like the Campagna of the year of our Lord 257, in the reign of Valerian Emperor, about the time in which the scenes of the present story are laid.

It had been, it is true, in days remote from that period, the threshing-floor of hostile and semi-barbarous invaders, who had trodden out its rich cities, leaving only their husks in heaps of formless ruin to mark the sites where they had stood, until the soil of centuries buried them out of sight, and nature tenderly draped the mounds over them with richest verdure, with delicate flowers whose tints were caught from the rainbow, and vines whose interlacing arms seemed to shield them from desecration. But now it was marked by ruins of stately temples, of ancient tombs, and crumbling towers of a later time; and scattered here and there stood



old gray villas, half buried in groves of olive and palm, that seemed to defy the mutations of fate.

However, while the cities of the Campagna were no more, a vast system of tillage, the heavy snows\* that lay upon it during the winter months, the sacred groves bordering the Pontine fens, whose luxuriant foliage absorbed their fatal miasms, made it a region, which as Livy, Strabo, Horace, Pliny, and Lucretius—each in his day—enthusiastically testify, was unsurpassed for its salubrity and beauty. Its coast was enriched by flourishing cities, and upon its green shores the emperors, from Tiberius Cæsar to Constantine, had elegant villas, to which they resorted in summer; while as long as the hot weather prevailed, distinguished poets, Roman patri-cians, and wealthy citizens, inhabited their own luxurious dwellings by the sea, diffusing prosperity among the peasants and fishermen, who supplied their tables, by a liberal expenditure of money.†

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\*Strabo, Pliny, Fenestrello, Livy, and other writers, speak of the severe winters, heavy snows, and frozen rivers.

†Those who have felt the spell of the Roman Campagna—apart from tourists' vexations—will not wonder that my pen lingers on a subject which has not only a deep and sacred interest to the Christian mind, but is also draped in lore which appeals irresistibly to the lover of classic history and poetry. As regards the readers to whom the subject is not familiar, we can only hope they may find enough interest in it to lead them at some future day to explore the scenes which we have briefly outlined.

Such was the Campagna on the morning we have described, with its pure, healthful air, and its hardy, light-hearted people, who, buoyant with life, were never saddened or stayed by thought of the countless generations that, in the repose of Hope, lay silent beneath it.

Nemesius had reached the suburbs of the city, outside the walls, near the gate of the Via Ardentina, whose denizens, of the lowest class, were mixed with many of the most degraded. A small wine-shop here and there and one or two miserable inns were being opened to the sunshine and air, as well as to any early customer that might straggle in. A few ragged, homeless beggars were prodding among garbage heaps, looking for scraps wherewith to appease their hunger. A squad of soldiers, who had been on guard all night, tramped heavily along the narrow, stone-paved street, on their way to the barracks; and two dogs, each holding the ear of the other in the vicious grip of its sharp teeth, as, erect, savage and growling, they struggled together, were the only signs of life apparent in the sleepy quarter.

Suddenly a wild, piercing shriek rent the air—a shriek such as only a woman in instant peril could utter. Nemesius spurred his horse in the direction whence it came, and saw a black-browed man, of large stature and muscular build, in pursuit of a half-clad woman, whom he overtook and seized, held back her head with one

hand, and rendered struggle impossible by twining his leg like an iron trap around her feet. In his right hand gleamed a short, two-edged knife, its blade broad and keen, which he uplifted, and in another instant would have plunged into her bare bosom, had not Nemesius, with the quickness of thought, sprang from his horse, strode swiftly behind him, and grasped his arm with a sudden and powerful wrench. Surprised and thrown off his balance, the ruffian loosened his grasp on the woman, to defend himself against his unseen assailant, but received a blow on the head from an iron-gloved hand, which sent him reeling into the street, where he fell, stunned and motionless.

The woman, a coarse, handsome virago, whose long, black hair fell in disordered masses around her, had fainted in the arms of an old crone, who howled piteously over her. By this time a group of half-dressed men and women, who had been aroused from their sleep by the woman's shriek, gathered around, and now a party of the civic guard appeared on the scene.

"Manacle that brute, and take him to prison at once; he has just tried to murder a woman," said Nemesius, addressing them. His tone was commanding, and, recognizing him, they proceeded to obey.

"It is the first time, by Cerberus, that the prize-fighter Cecco has ever been thrown off his legs!" exclaimed a man, grinning.

"I always thought his conceit would have a fall; it's in the nature of things," laughed another. If the bully had any friends, they were not there, it seemed.

"It wasn't his conceit altogether, Burbo, but a hand better skilled in pugilism than his own," observed a man, gazing admiringly at the tall, stately form of Nemesius, who moved towards the woman to ascertain if she was living or dead. At that moment she opened her great, black eyes, and gazed with a wild, fixed stare on his face. He dropped a gold coin into her hand, which lay, palm up, by her side, and saw that her fingers instantly clutched it; then he turned back, and was about mounting his horse, when, impelled by an impulse which he could neither resist nor explain, he asked an old man who the woman was.

"She is Cypria, the—" (what, need not be written). "She's as bad as Cecco."

"She's a *woman*!" was the grave, brief response of Nemesius, as he rode away.

They all wondered who this officer of rank could be, who had turned out of his way to the help of such as they. It was not usual.

"That," said a soldier, who had sneaked into a wine-shop to get out of sight, when he saw who had appeared on the scene—"that is the great commander, Nemesius."

It was with a sense of relief that Nemesius got away from the place; he put his horse in a trot,

passed within the Ardentina gate, and traversed the streets leading most directly to his destination. But his design was thwarted; for as he turned into the Vico Mamertino, the way was obstructed by a turbulent crowd in advance of him, which surged around some object in its midst, towards which its wrath was directed. A mob in a Roman street was too common an occurrence for notice, but this was not one of the usual sort. It was not composed of the worst elements of the population of Rome, although they were there in force; there were also officials and respectable citizens. In the centre of the surging human mass, towering above it, appeared the iron helmets of soldiers.

Nemesius had approached, and was now near enough to hear and see from his saddle what it all meant. It was only a Christian Deacon—one Laurence—for whom there had been a long search, who had been apprehended that morning on the Appian Way, and was now being conducted to the dungeons of the Mamertine. They would have goaded him along, but there was no need; for, with head erect, his noble face radiant with supreme hope, and his eyes full of serene courage, his steps required no urging. Had not his persecutors pressed so closely upon him, he would have outstripped them in his haste towards the palm and crown of the final victory he had so long hoped for. Their shouts of derision, their threats of the lions, their blows and insults

did not move his composure, and he opened not his lips, except, like his beloved Lord and Master, to pray for those who thirsted for his blood.

The swirling mob now approached a statue of Jupiter—one of the hundreds erected to this false deity which adorned Rome\*—and a thousand roaring voices shouted to the holy captive to make an act of homage to their god. He cast his eyes over the circle of furious faces that surrounded him; the mad human bellowing dropped into the silence of expectation, and while every eye watched for the demanded sign, his clear voice ascended like a pæan of triumph, and his words fell upon every ear: “The idols of the Gentiles are silver and gold, the work of the hands of men. But our God is in heaven; He hath done whatsoever He would.”†

In another moment the Christian deacon would have been torn to pieces, had not the soldiers, who had orders to consign him to the keepers of the Mamertine, fearing punishment through failure to obey, dispersed the mob by main force, regardless where or on whom their blows fell; their zeal quickened at sight of Nemesis, in whose eyes, they well knew, a negligent performance of duty would find no excuse. A few minutes later, and the massive doors of the frowning prison closed on their saintly victim.

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\*Rome had eighty gold statues of Jupiter, and sixty-six of ivory, besides others of marble and bronze.—*Amperè*.

† Psalm cxiii.

To look in for a brief moment at his child, see her face brighten with sudden joy at the sound of his footsteps, and give her tender greeting, was all that Nemesius allowed himself on reaching his palace; for, after partaking of refreshments, which he much needed after his fatiguing journey and long fast, doffing his armor, and changing his attire, he was—in obedience to a note which had been presented to him as he dismounted from his horse—to join the Emperor at the Baths of Sallust,\* the favorite resort of Valerian, where his hours of leisure were spent in the enjoyment of pleasures indulged in by debased natures.

The Emperor was in a gay mood, the cause of which, after the usual florid salutation, he imparted to Nemesius with great glee, as, wrapped in a loose robe of fine linen, he reposed in his perfumed bath.

“The commanders,” he began, “ordered by us some time ago to examine the military pulse

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\* These establishments of the ancient Romans were on a grand scale. Some of the baths were like miniature lakes; others—the warm and vapor-baths—were smaller. They were fitted up with every imaginable luxury. In apartments adorned with beautiful statuary, mosaic floors, and frescoed walls, the rarest wines and choicest viands were served. There were libraries which contained the best authors, and suites of private rooms, where, uninterrupted, the patrician guests could enjoy their secret revels. Gaming was the amusement most indulged in. Of the Roman baths, those of Titus, of Sallust, of Caracalla, Diocletian, and others, were, at different periods, the most celebrated.

—for one never can be too sure of the soldiery—brought us the most favorable reports this morning. Some vague rumors of war had reached the camps, and the prospects of active service had already stirred up the wildest enthusiasm. The Prætorian Guard has spoken, and holds itself in readiness to take its old place in the van when the imperial eagles lead. And, my Neme-sius, as a sign that the gods are propitious to the great enterprise on hand, and have accepted the zealous and renewed severity of our efforts to exterminate the seditious followers of the Christus, several of the most noted ringleaders of this sect have been taken into custody, and await the punishment their crimes deserve, which, by the gods! shall be neither light nor easy.

“Thou wilt rejoice to learn that Æmilianus, the edile, who has become the most arrogant, contumacious, and defiant contemner of the gods, is expiating his folly in the depths of the Tullian; and, to crown all, just as we were preparing to come hither to enjoy a little relaxation, a messenger arrived to report to us the arrest of one Laurence, who, it is said, possesses magical power to work wonders, by which he deludes the people, and has a tongue so eloquent that he seduces thousands to his false belief. The destruction of such a leader will strike a heavy blow at the pestiferous sect. By the infernal gods! we shall see some rare sport at the Temple of Mars and the Flavian Amphitheatre before



many days!" exclaimed the brutal tyrant, with a hoarse gurgle in his throat, which meant laughter.

Nemesius mentioned having met Laurence an hour or two before, as he was being conducted, under guard, to the Mamertine. "And, having seen him," he continued, "I can readily imagine him to be a dangerous man. One whose face shines like a god's when he addresses the people, as I saw his do, is a dangerous thaumaturgist, the success of whose miracles lies in his power of impressing the imagination of those who listen to him."

"It will be a wonder if by these arrests we don't find the way to their treasures, which they manage to conceal so successfully. By Plutus! our need for money has never been greater than now, that another war threatens."

After some time spent in the discussion of secret matters, Valerian sounded a note on his gold whistle to summon his attendants, and, turning to Nemesius with a throaty laugh and wicked leer, remarked:

"Thou wilt find a new group of marble nymphs beyond that curtain; await us there. By the time these slaves are through with us, the prandial\* feast will be spread, to which we invite thee."

The invitation was a command. Nemesius signified his assent, and, drawing aside the

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\*Corresponding with our lunch.

drapery, passed beyond, into a small, exquisitely fitted apartment.\* The statuary to which his attention had been directed, he found repulsive to his severely classic taste, as being suggestive of base ideals; and he turned willingly from it to occupy himself with a volume of Lucretius, which was lying open on a reading-stand of carved citrean wood.

When Valerian, fresh from his bath, redolent with sweet unguents, arrayed in white and purple, his jewelled *soleæ* loosely strapped on his bare feet, his large, fat fingers blazing with superb gems, and a wreath of sweet laurel encircling his brutal head, at last made his appearance, Nemesius was so absorbed in the sophistical arguments of Lucretius, in his attempt to prove that the soul is mortal, he was unconscious of his presence, until he heard him say, in jeering tones: "Philosophy before pleasure is the legend of thy life. We fear our nymphs do not please thee."

"Forgive my inattention," he said, rising, and not unobservant of the sarcastic expression of the Emperor's face. "I must confess a preference for a higher idealization. Under certain conditions, if art be too true to nature, its delineations must of necessity be coarse and suggestive. The early sculptors of Greece understood this nice distinction in their chaste and graceful creations."

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\* We use this word, not in its European sense, meaning a suite of rooms, but in the English, which means only one.

He replaced the volume of Lucretius on the the reading-desk, thinking that never had he seen Valerian present so repulsive an aspect.

"We fear thy tastes are too severe for the times, and will strip thy life of many pleasures. But come: we are as hungry as a German wolf; let us feast and be merry," he said, leading the way to a beautiful apartment, where a luxurious feast of rich viands, rare fruits, and old wines awaited the imperial palate, which already watered at the spicy, savory odor that pervaded the atmosphere.

Strains of soft music from unseen performers breathed on the air, that was made fragrant by an invisible spray of perfume, which, in gentle dews, moistened and brightened the garlands and flowers that decorated the table. Nothing that could delight the senses was absent. The prandial feast was succeeded by those enjoyments of a baser sort in which Valerian's low nature was accustomed to indulge; and, knowing by past experience that his guest would not participate in them, he graciously dismissed him, little dreaming of the disgust and contempt the latter felt towards him.

As if to purify himself from the contamination of the last few hours, Nemesius immersed himself in a vapor-bath, then plunged into a cold one, and by the time he emerged into the sweet, balmy open air, where every object was tinted with the after-glow of sunset, the offended dig-

nity of his noble nature had resumed its usual equipoise. The thought of his sweet, blind Claudia, which, like a sacred bird, had been scared away by the too near approach of pollution, now again folded its soft, sad wings in his heart, speeding him more quickly towards her.

The group that met his eye as he paused a moment on the threshold of the child's richly decorated reception room, bright with lights and flowers, awoke an involuntary smile on his grave face—the Princess Vivian in the midst, a sad smile on her lips, which the merry twinkle in her eyes belied; Claudia on a low, cushioned seat beside her, with one arm thrown across the Princess' lap, against which she confidently leaned; Fabian in front of them, telling one of his fabulous stories, full of quips and fancies, which irresistibly moved his hearers to laughter; and Zilla a little apart, regarding them with a sweet, grave expression on her beautiful pale face, which meant: "I would die to have this last!"

Zilla, ever on the watch, glanced around, and caught sight of Nemesius, who laid his finger on his lip, and beckoned her to him. No one but herself had seen him; and, rising, she excused herself by saying, in her soft, quiet tones: "There's a draught; I will close the curtain at the entrance." And she glided past the group without interrupting them, they were so well used to her watchful ways about Claudia.

She stepped out, closing the heavy drapery

over the entrance behind her, and stood in the ante-room, where Nemesius was waiting.

"I wished to hear how Claudia is, and how it has been with her during my absence," he said, speaking low.

"She is well in health. She has missed thee, and wished for thee, as she always does. Now she will be brighter for thy presence."

"Tell me—I wish to hear if the knowledge of her misfortune has made her unhappy, or how it has affected her."

"It is a new and trying phase in her life, and she can not accommodate herself to it all at once. Since she knows that she is in darkness, she longs for the light. When she moves about alone, she is always fearful of striking against something, or of stumbling and falling. She has an insatiate desire to know exactly how everything looks; her questions are endless; then she sighs, and wishes she could see; and, knowing their power, wonders if the gods can not open her eyes, and why they do not pity her. I say what I can to comfort her, but I can no longer deceive her; it is impossible, knowing her own case as she does. I can only try to inspire her with courage, until my words sound almost heartless to myself. She has learnt some little airs on my lute, which give her great pleasure. Fabian has been here daily, and the Princess—ever since she heard what happened—has been so kind and motherly in her attentions, that Claudia begins, I think, really to love her."

"Ah!" said Nemeseius, with an intonation that expressed pleasure.

"She has one dread—shall I tell thee all?"

"Yes, all."

"She can not bear the thought of going to Salernum and Capreæ; she says it is too far. She has asked a thousand questions about the sea, of which I think she has a secret dread; for distance and vastness are incomprehensible to her mind. The idea of them is abysmal; and when she tries to realize their meaning, she gasps for breath, and covers her face with her hands, saying: 'I can not!—it is no use!' She would be far happier at the villa. The Jew-healer has seen Fabian, and thinks, all things considered, that the sea-trip should be avoided."

"And thou—what is thy own opinion, Zilla?"

"I agree with him, as she is so averse to it, and her health does not require the change," she answered, timidly.

"I may change my plans. A war is impending; if it breaks out I shall have to enter the strife at the head of my legion, and must provide for my child some safe sanctuary, out of harm's way," he continued abstractedly.

A thousand thoughts surged through the heart of Nemeseius; he walked away to the other extremity of the long, narrow ante-room, and Zilla re-entered the reception room, just as Fabian brought his story to a most astonishing and ridiculous climax, for which he was rewarded by the

merry laughter of his audience, in which he himself joined as heartily as if he had been listening to a first-rate comedy instead of reciting one.

"Until to-night, I feared that all the improvisators of Italy were dead," said the Princess Vivia, when she recovered her breath. It had been too much for her; the honest laugh, that had at first twinkled only in her eyes, had burst through all the restraints of widowed propriety upon her lips, her face, and put the whole of her well-conditioned body in a quiver of mirth.

Nemesius came in, and Fabian sprang forward to greet him. With a cry of joy Claudia's arms were in another instant around his neck; and the Princess, who by a violent effort had suddenly resumed her widowed expression, held out her hand, which Nemesius raised to his lips and kissed, with that graceful and deferential air which in all ages has been the most delicate homage that can be offered by a man to a woman.

It was a happy evening, supremely so to Claudia; and when at last the Princess—who, whenever she could do so with propriety, kept the poultry hours of the Alban hill—arose to retire, Nemesius accompanied her to her apartments, and asked her permission to say a few words, if it would not be troublesome. In reply, she cordially invited him to enter, wondering what on earth was coming. When he had seen her comfortably seated in her cushioned chair

and drawn a footstool for her feet, he stood leaning against a pillar, so silent that he might have been taken for a statue of Harpocrates; for the thoughts that were at the moment revolving in his mind concentrated and absorbed every faculty.

"I have a great favor to ask," he at last said.

"Consider it granted, whatever it may be, if it lies within the scope of my power," she gravely answered, impressed by his manner, and a certain emotion which he could not entirely suppress, but which possibly would not have been apparent to any eye except a woman's.

"I am a man of but few words. Promise me to refuse without hesitation what I shall ask, if it be not agreeable or convenient. Thou must have heard ere this that we may have war with a foreign power: every messenger that comes into Rome is expected to bring information of aggressions which will not allow the contest to be postponed a single day. It is only a question of time. Thou knowest the fortunes of war. I shall go to the front with my legionaries, and may never return. In case I fall, wilt thou be a mother to my blind, helpless child?"

"The gods avert such a fate from thee!" exclaimed the Princess, with quick tears; "but—but—but should they so order it, yes: I will indeed take thy sweet child for my own." She held out her plump, white hands, which he grasped, and then, leaning over, kissed her forehead.



"So we seal the compact. To-morrow I will make all the necessary arrangements transferring her to thy care, and will leave to Fabian the guardianship of her fortune—a charge which would be too troublesome for thee. Receive my grateful thanks for thy ready acquiescence in my wishes, and the immense relief it has given me," said Nemesius, his few words meaning more than a hundred spoken by most men.

"My Nemesius, my kinsman," continued the Princess, nervously, "wilt thou listen to something which I, in turn, have long wished to say to thee—something which I have much at heart, but dare not give utterance to without thy promise not to be offended?"

"There must be no question of offence between us, after what has just passed. It is possible I may have to refuse thee. It will give me great pain to do so, should imperative reasons allow me no alternative. Open thy heart to me, then, frankly and with confidence," replied Nemesius, in low, kind tones.

"Speaking of thy lovely child and the war," said the Princess, girding up her courage—for having got thus far, she saw she would have to keep on—"the war, which may not come, or if it should, there's no reason why thou shouldst not escape its perils—would it not be better, for thy own happiness and her future, if thou wert married? It is thy duty to give to thy daughter a mother, who would tenderly care for her,

and train her according to her rank. I know of one, beautiful, accomplished, and of high birth—not unknown to thee—who would fulfil thy highest requirements, and preside with dignity over thy home—”

“Dear Princess,” said Nemesius, gently, as the emotions of the Princess gathered in a lump in her throat, and threatened to choke her, “accept my thanks for thy interest in my welfare, which I am convinced is sincere and well-meant; but my heart is wedded to the bride of my youth, whose place no other can ever fill. As to my child, nature can sever, but never renew the sacredness of such a tie as that between a child and the mother who gave it life. Let what has passed between us on this subject go into oblivion. May happiest dreams visit thee, my gentle kinswoman!”

The Princess had covered her face with the end of her scarf, ashamed, sorry, and angry with herself for having ventured on such a delicate subject with a man so reserved and unlike other men as Nemesius; and when she removed it, and timidly lifted her eyes to his in mute appeal for pardon, he was no longer there.

## CHAPTER XIII.

A BLOW---REVOLT OF THE SLAVES OF HIPPO-  
LYTUS---FABIAN'S VIEWS.

TRUE to his word, Valerian gave renewed impetus to the persecution by the increased severity of his edicts, threatening extreme penalties to those charged with their execution should they fail to carry them out to the letter. Throughout the Roman Empire the tempest raged, losing no iota of its savage cruelty by distance from its centre.

Daily, from the prisons and the dungeons of Rome, like sheep led to the slaughter, the victims of his wrath were offered two alternatives—to deny Christ, or to be given over to the torturers, to the wild beasts of the arena, and to the flames; to be stifled in the *cloacæ* or drowned in the Tiber; their places ever replenished by others, who also rejoiced in their bonds, fearing not those who destroy the body; while, as through broken prison bars, their glad souls escaped to their eternal triumph, to receive their palms from him in the likeness of whose Passion they had suffered.

Can we not imagine the angelic sentinels on the outposts of the celestial country echoing the

plaintive threnody of the Prophet as that multitude, radiant with solemn joy, approached: "Who are these that come from Edom, with dyed garments from Bosra? . . . Why is their apparel red, and their garments like theirs that tread in the wine-press?"\*

And yet the daily business of life, its whirl, its struggles, its petty ambitions, went on as usual in Rome's spacious streets; sounds of mirth were in the air, music and laughter in her palaces, peace and love in her homes. The games went on in her amphitheatres; gladiators contended in her circus arenas; the festivals of the gods were celebrated with gorgeous rites; the smoke ascended from her altars of sacrifice in the temples; her Forum resounded with oratory, her theatres rang with applause; while the golden sunshine crowned her hills with splendor, and the tide of human passions rolled on, undisturbed by the fact that a few miserable Christians, who defied the gods and conspired against the state, were being torn to death by savage beasts, or tortured until life, like the Arctic sun, seemed about to be swallowed up in darkness, but which straightway arose out of the midnight to a new and brighter day.

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\* Isaias, lxiii. The sacred text reads: "Who is *this* that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bosra? Why is *thy* apparel red and thy garments," etc., etc.

By Edom and Bosra, commentators say may be understood cities and places of the wicked.

Fabian had left the palace of Nemeseius on the preceding evening, highly encouraged in his theory that, by certain methods, Fate could be circumvented in Claudia's case, and her life be made happy notwithstanding her blindness; and he was quite willing to bide the time which it would require to realize his hopes.

Stepping gayly along in the moonlight, a thought crossed his mind which had once or twice before, in the course of the day, annoyed him. He had a certain *protégé* to whom he was much attached, and in whose career he had taken a great interest, but whom he had neither seen nor heard from for several days. This was Evaristus, the young orator whom he had one night at the imperial palace pointed out to Laodice as a budding Cicero, and who since then had more than fulfilled the expectations of his friends. Fabian, in his own delicate and irresistible way, had assisted him liberally—for Evaristus was poor—determined that the want of money should not retard his studies, and consequently his advancement; in fact, he was his good genius, and felt that he would be more than rewarded by the success which would crown his efforts to renew the golden age of Roman oratory.

But what had become of Evaristus? It was now five days since he had seen him, and as it was not late, he concluded to go to his house and inquire what had become of him; but on arriving there, he found it closed and dark, and to his

repeated knocks there came no response whatever. Remembering that this was a reception night at the imperial palace, he turned his steps thither, assured of meeting among the guests some mutual friend who could give him the information he desired.

He was successful in his quest, but that which he heard took away his breath, and moved the very centres of his being. Evaristus had been seized with the Christian craze, and in a ringing speech had publicly denounced the gods, renounced paganism, and declared himself a believer in the Christ. He was at once arrested, taken before the prefect, where he repeated his blasphemies, and was cast into a subterranean dungeon to await his sentence. He went away, between his rough guards, smiling as if he were marching to a triumph. That is all Fabian could then learn, and wrapping his toga around him, he drew his hood over his head, and went away, speechless with grief and rage. "Fool! fool! insensate fool!" he at last uttered, "to have so recklessly sacrificed a noble career!"

He arose the next morning—the fever of his mind not allayed by a sleepless night—resolved to shake the dust of Rome from his feet, and get away for a day, at least, out of this atmosphere of cruelty; for Fabian was an amiable and, secretly, a liberal pagan, with an organization so sensitive that everything like violence was as a physical hurt to him.—a fact which did not de-

teriorate the courageous qualities of his nature. If Evaristus was mad, he argued, it was a madness that had a method in it, as the Christians daily exemplified,—a method like adamant, which could neither be bent nor broken; how, then, could he hope to influence him, especially since, conspicuous for his brilliant talents, it would be the policy of his judges to make a signal example of him?

Fabian wrote, however, to the most noted lawyer in Rome to discover the whereabouts of his friend, and to spare neither money nor pains in the endeavor to effect his release; then he breakfasted, and mounting his horse, put him to a brisk canter, which soon brought him to the Urban Way, where it trends up and along the Viminal, towards the rocky and wooded heights beyond. He meant to visit an old friend of his father's, the Senator Lentulus, who passed a dreamy, secluded life in his ancient villa up there among the beauty and silence of the hills.

His long ride had given time for the tumult of his mind to exhaust itself, in a measure; and now the shadows cast by the great trees over the winding road, and the unbroken quiet, refreshed and soothed him.

In the meantime, as Nemesius, who had gone at an early hour to the camp of his veterans, to his daily inspection of their discipline and drill, determined that both should reach the highest point of military tactics before the war began,

was riding leisurely down the Viminal he saw Fabian approaching by a side road that joined the Urban Way, and also observed that his countenance wore an unusually grave and preoccupied aspect.

"Fortune has favored me, Nemesisius; for I was returning to the city to seek thee," he said, after the usual salutations. "Had we not met, I must have gone home and impaled one of my slaves, by way of relieving my mind."

"What new absurdity burdens it, Fabian?" asked Nemesisius, with a grave smile.

"No absurdity this time, but thoughts which, by the infernal gods! I must pour out into some friendly ear, or perish," he replied, his usual genial smiles exchanged for an expression which Nemesisius could not understand. "Do me a kindness, my Achates: turn back, and go with me to thy villa on the Aventine, where I may say all that I have it in my mind to say, without danger of crucifixion or something worse."

"Willingly; I am at leisure," he answered, turning his horse's head. "How far hast thou been to-day?" he asked, hoping to find a clue to his friend's strange mood.

"Only to visit that grand old Roman, Lentulus, a well-preserved fossil of nobler and better times. He's still harping on the old subject of the Greek conquest, and the evil effects which he insists it has produced on the Roman character. It is a strange coincidence that Ben Asa, the



Jew, also imputes the first decadence of his people to their intermingling with and living among the Greeks. History is full of singular problems, which are only solved when it is too late for the mistakes of nations to be repaired *Eheu!*" sighed Fabian.

"I agree with the sage Lentulus. Greece has avenged herself by the enervating potions she has held to the lips of her conquerors," answered Nemesius. "Except her learning and art, she has brought us no substantial good. But such topics have gone out of fashion; they are left to old men who live in the historic Past, and believe that the Present is going to destruction."

"When I left the venerable man I was so elevated, I assure thee, by the nobility of his sentiments, that I felt as if I had been listening to the utterances of an oracle. The theme composed me, and raised my mind to a more exalted plane than the turbulent one on which it is our misfortune to exist; but, by Hercules! as I approached the Urban Way, my dreams were upset by such a howling and shouting, that I thought Erebus had broken loose. Quickening the speed of my horse, I soon reached the scene of tumult—that old house with a tower, which has a tradition of of having once served as a fortress, and is now the property of a rich man named Hippolytus. Thou must have noticed it in passing."

"I know it," said Nemesius. "It has not been long since my late duties led me to observe

it more closely than I desired. I inspected the horrible dungeons under it."

"Those dungeons served Hippolytus a good turn to-day. The tumult was caused by his slaves, who anticipated the ides of August, and prematurely began the Saturnalia. It was, in fact, a revolt. It did not last long. The keepers, well armed, and the task-masters with whips, assisted by laborers from a stone quarry near by, soon brought them to subjection, after some of them were killed and others wounded. They were then manacled, and thrown into the old dungeons under the tower. It was highly exciting, and brought me down with a jar from the heights to which Lentulus had sent me soaring," said Fabian, who, as Nemesius thought, still held in reserve a deeper cause of disturbance than the occurrence he had just related; but he only said:

"Slaves require strong discipline; for, being human, the restraints of bondage must sometimes become intolerable." Then for a little while they rode along in silence.

"Would my sweet little lady Claudia ever forgive me," said Fabian, presently, "if she knew that I neglected to ask for her before everything else? How is she?"

"Well, but rather timid and fearful," answered Nemesius. "She is as one who has been suddenly deprived of sight, instead of having been blind from her birth. I left her very happy

this morning, having told her that, instead of going away to the sea, we should spend the summer on the Aventine, if she preferred it. The excess of her joy was so great that I could readily measure by it the pain it would have cost her to go elsewhere."

"I rejoice in the change of plan. I soon discovered that the one fixed upon filled her mind with vague dread; but up there, in the beautiful gardens, she will sip nepenthe, while the birds sing her welcome home. How soon wilt thou leave the city?"

"Almost immediately. I intended to make no change—the weather being pleasant—until we started South; now the sooner we get back to the villa, the better for my child."

"And the Princess?" questioned Fabian, with just the ghost of a twinkle in his eyes.

"She will spend a week at the villa, then return home, where she is sure everything is going to wreck and ruin for want of her presence. She has made me a promise, Fabian, of which I will tell thee presently, as it is connected with an affair with which I am about to tax thy friendship," answered Nemesius, as they began to ascend the Aventine.

"I am thine unto death, my Achates! unless thou art conspiring with the Princess to throw the matrimonial noose about my neck." said Fabian, laughing. "In all else, I repeat, I am thine unto death." Words lightly spoken, but faithfully kept, as events will show.

"Such friendship as thine, Fabian, takes much of its curse away from life. I believe and trust thee," replied Nemesis.

The old steward, who had observed their approach, went out to receive them, welcome beaming on his countenance.

"I fear, Symphronius, thou hast had a lonely time of it lately," said Nemesis, greeting him kindly.

"That is not to be wondered at, my noble sir; for we miss our sweet little lady more and more every day. A double loss, truly; for when she is away, we see thee but seldom."

"She is nowhere as happy as here, and is pining for home, for which reasons we shall return to the villa in a few days, to stay until the October frosts have killed the flowers." (Nemesis little dreamed, as he spoke, of the wonderful flowers that were to bloom for him and his child amidst the October frosts.) "Canst thou find us something to eat and drink?" he asked.

"That is joyful news—the best I have heard for many a long day. The repast will soon be served, and the oldest flask of Cæcuban wine in the vault set before thee," said Symphronius, taking down his keys, over which a busy spider was spinning its web.

During the prandial repast of cold meats, salads, fruits, and snow-cooled wine, Fabian's wit sparkled and flashed fitfully; one moment he was silent, the next exhilarated. Never had Neme

sius seen him in such a mood, and taking it in connection with certain things he had said on the Urban Way, he concluded that his gayety was forced; but seemed not to observe anything unusual, and when they had finished their repast, proposed adjourning to the gardens.

Fabian swore that it was a happy inspiration, and they went out together, sauntering slowly through those scenes, whose lavish beauty was intensified by the fragrance of a thousand flowers, the flickering, golden shadows, the chime of fountains, and the songs of birds, until they reached the ilex grove, near the grotto of Silenus, where the knarled, moss-covered roots of the ancient trees afforded resting-places of the most grotesque forms, where one could either sit or recline. At another time Fabian's sensitive nature would have been in harmony with surroundings so perfect, but the sudden shock of the evening before had struck a note of discord, which still jangled painfully out of tune, and clouded even his love for the beautiful.

"Now, my Nemesisius," said Fabian, when the two friends had taken seats in the ilex grove. "I will unveil my sorrow."

"Sorrow! Why hast thou kept it back until now, my friend? It is, indeed, difficult for me to realize sorrow and thee hand in hand."

"It is true, nevertheless. Not all my vaunted stoicism has made me impervious. Thou hast heard me speak of Evaristus and his wonderful eloquence?"

"Yes; not only that, but I myself have been entranced by it. What of him?"

"Thou hast not heard, then?"

"Since my return yesterday, every moment of my time has been so occupied, first with the Emperor, then at the camp of my veterans, that no current news of any sort has reached me. I trust that no ill has befallen Evaristus."

"Thou mayest judge: he has become a Christian! Not satisfied to be one secretly, he was mad enough to declare his error openly from the rostrum, when the Forum had hardly standing room for the people who had come to hear his speech. Swept away by the torrent of his eloquence—how well I can imagine it!—they at first failed to catch the significance of his words; and even when they did, so grand was his effort that their impulse was to applaud. But the fact that he had blasphemed the gods, denounced the cruelty of Valerian, and declared himself a Christian, was not to be ignored; and with sudden fury they rushed upon him where he stood smiling and fearless, dragged him from the rostrum to the prefect, who heard the accusation and his dauntless confession, after which he was beaten on the mouth with a heavy stone, and cast into one of the filthy underground dungeons, to await sentence. That is all I know. I loved the boy; I was proud of his genius, and the glory his renown would have shed on the Roman name," said Fabian, while a slight tremor quivered around his sensitive lips.

"Except that his mad act has brought pain to thee, Fabian, I should say he is rightly served. He knew the penalty of his offence, and his audacity in declaring it in the manner he did proves his willingness to accept the consequences," said Nemesisus, in grave, low tones.

"By the furies! I say it's a small thing to extinguish such a life for; and altogether out of proportion, if measured by the honors his brilliant career would have brought the State, to say nothing of services which might some day save it. The loss is Rome's, not his," exclaimed Fabian.

"Rome can afford to lose disloyal men," said Nemesisus.

"I deny that Evaristus is a disloyal man. No citizen of the Roman Empire had its glory, its power, its prosperity, more at heart than he," replied Fabian, in tones of positive conviction.

"How can one be loyal who defies the law and insults the gods?"

"I deny that loyalty is a matter of sentiment: it is a principle that is proven by a man's acts, not his beliefs. If he prefers to worship one god or none, instead of twelve or a thousand, I do not see how it affects his loyalty, his *acts* all being loyal. History gives us many examples of men, who were devout worshippers of the gods, overturning the Empire by their treasons; but, Nemesisus, no treason has ever yet been *proven* against a Christian. It is beyond question of

doubt that they have been brave in war, wise in council, just in administering the laws, and invulnerable to corruption, until some edict against their sect is published, or it is suddenly discovered by envious and covetous persons that they have all along been Christians—then all past services are forgotten; their lofty virtues, so often compared with Cato's, are ignored; they are pronounced traitors, tortured and put to death like the vilest criminals—aye, far more cruelly—for—a belief!"

"I trust thou art not infected with the insidious poison of their belief," said Nemesius, a dark glow rising to his face.

"No," replied Fabian, laughing; "I am a loyal Roman citizen according to thy own definition, and worship only the gods—with a reservation, however."

"Even so, my Fabian, these are dangerous times to indulge in eccentric sentiments," said Nemesius, with a sense of relief; "but explain—"

"My reservation? I may presently," interrupted Fabian, "provided thou wilt patiently bear with me while I disburden my mind of its long-accumulated impressions. It is better that thy friendly ear should hear them than that I should explode them some time in public. Thou dost kindly assent? Well, then, the first question I would have solved is: To what end is this dreadful slaughter of the people known as Christians? If it is to exterminate them, do not re-



sults prove the attempt a failure? If the gods willed to avenge their insulted majesty on the Christians for refusing to worship them, being gods, could they not exterminate them by a single blow? That they do not do so proves, in my opinion, that the gods are not so jealous of their own supreme honor as mortals suppose, or that—which seems incredible—they are not omniscient. Or it may be they know that all fallacies expend themselves, as flame expends the fuel on which it feeds, leaving only ashes; and with sublime indifference leave mankind to the folly of their own conceptions. These things may or may not be; we can only shape hypotheses where there's a lack of dogma. Therefore, we will leave the gods, and descend to things we do know, and consider the war against the Christians as a measure of state policy.

"Yesterday," continued Fabian, "Evaristus was the idol of Rome. By some inscrutable agency he becomes a Christian: to-day he is chained in a noisome dungeon, into which no ray of light can penetrate, and will doubtless expiate his mistake by a cruel death, which he will bear with undaunted heroism, as they all do. We know how the Roman people deify heroism—how they adore that higher quality of courage which yields nothing except mortality to death, looking upon the sacrifice not as a defeat, but a triumph. The brute courage of gladiators, which sometimes makes a spectacle

for a Roman holiday, is quite a different thing; for their motive, like their courage, is ignoble: they risk their lives for a price; to kill or be killed, for a few ounces of gold, is their trade. The spectators bet on the chances of their struggle: money is lost and won on the bloody game; the savage instincts of the people are satisfied when it is over, and there it ends.

“On the other hand, a despised Christian will suffer the most barbaric tortures with unshaken fortitude; he will be cast to the lions, without a weapon to defend himself against their hungry rage; he will meet his fate with exalted heroism; he will even chant the exulting hymns of his faith while his flesh is being torn and his bones cracked by their cruel teeth, until he dies—not for gold, like the gladiator, my Nemesius, but for his belief. Nor does it end here, as in the other case when the spectacle is over; for in the minds of many who witness it the questions arise: ‘Why does this man die? What is this strange belief for which he suffers,—a belief that is of more value than life, and stronger than death? It must be something greater than we know of.’

“One such death—one Christian dead—and ten are converted by his example. For every ten converted by one, a hundred may be safely counted. From this induction, it is plain that computation by numbers is an impossibility; for so it has been going on since the days of Nero.

But it is a statistical as well as historic fact that this sect multiplies and increases its followers a thousand times more in times of persecution than in the few decades of peace that occasionally intervene. I look upon these persecutions—I call them such for want of a better name—as more destructive to the strength of the Empire than its wars, by the profuse waste of good human material, which might otherwise be used for its defence and the glory of its arms. Under certain emperors it has been so utilized, and none were found more loyal, and brave, and just, than the Christians in the performance of every duty assigned them, whether civic or military, until the hue and cry of a fresh persecution cut short their usefulness by their sudden destruction. I contend that there is no government so powerful that it can afford such wholesale destruction of its best sinews.”

“They deny the gods, which is incompatible with true loyalty. The religious system of a State is the key-stone of its safety. The link that binds the two together must be indissolubly preserved,” said Nemesius, with lowering brow.

“Consider, as I said before, my Nemesius, the power ascribed to the gods. Is it omnipotent? Evidently they are indifferent to a sect so contemptible that it has but one God, and according to report, the most senseless forms of worship; otherwise they would destroy it.”

There was in Fabian’s words an indefinable

spirit of satire, felt more strongly than expressed, and he continued: "But it sometimes happens that a balance is struck, when the gods are deaf, and the one God of the Christians is not. A single instance, familiar to every school-boy in Rome, will illustrate my idea. It is of the Christian Legion, who, by their prayers, saved the army of Marcus Aurelius in Germany, when it was perishing for water, and all means of getting it were cut off by the enemy, to whom its utter defeat, unless by some remarkable intervention it should be relieved, presented no difficulties. I remember every word of the Emperor's letter to the Senate as it stands on the historic page; for it made a wonderful impression on my youthful mind; and, as it tells the story better than I could do, I will repeat it verbatim.

"'I put up my fervent prayers to the gods to send us relief,' the Emperor wrote; 'but the gods were deaf. I knew there were many Christians in the army, and, all other means failing, I called them around me, and commanded them to address their God in our behalf. No sooner had they fallen on their knees to pray than a copious and refreshing rain fell from the heavens. But, while the rain was refreshing to us, it drove furiously against our enemies, like a tempest of hail, attended with vivid flashes of lightning and dreadful claps of thunder.'

"That Marcus Aurelius was a devout worshipper of the gods none will deny, but mark

his concluding words: 'Wherefore, since the prayers of this people are so powerful with their God, let us grant to the Christians full liberty of professing themselves such, lest they employ their prayers against us. My will is that their religion be no longer considered a crime against them.'

"What higher instance of political sagacity on this vexed question can be shown than this charge of Marcus Aurelius to the Roman Senate?" observed Fabian.

"It strikes me that he was influenced by a superstitious dread rather than political wisdom; and, notwithstanding, if I remember, many Christians suffered under his reign," replied Nemesius.

"Whatever his motive, the wisdom was in the act. Yes: the fires of wrath were again kindled through the violence of his colleague in the Empire—Verus; and being the last of the five good emperors, his son Commodus renewed the bloody work, which has been going on, with little cessation, ever since," Fabian answered, as he inhaled the fragrance of a handful of violets he had plucked from an interstice in the root of the old tree against which he leaned, then tossed them away.

"It has always been the policy of Rome not to interfere with the national religion of any of the peoples she conquers, but the Christians were merely a sect in Judea, where they origin-

ated. There they were suspected, and not tolerated; for then, and ever since, wherever they may be, they have practised their rites in secret, and have acted like conspirators united by a terrible oath to accomplish a distinct purpose. It is known that they predict the overthrow of the gods, threaten the Roman power with destruction, and proclaim their allegiance to a king who, they claim, will bring the whole earth under his sceptre. They are wonder-workers: I have seen strange things myself; but it is well known that they are versed in the deepest mysteries of magic, and practise their arts to delude the people," said Nemesius, firmly convinced of the truth of all he said.

"Those are some of the charges against them," replied Fabian; "and there may be a shadow of truth in them. All creeds have a mysterious, esoteric language, by which they veil meanings that, from their point of view, are too sacred for the profane eye. But it has sometimes occurred to me that the very *fact* of the Roman Empire, and its unity of government, will be a great factor in the diffusion of Christianity; for, as some one—who seems to have faith in his own convictions—asserts, it is not only a compulsory assemblage of polytheistic nations, but its construction is particularly favorable to the proselyting system of Christianity, in affording it a vast and compact surface for its united operations against polytheism, which it is re-

solved to supersede and destroy. This, I must confess, gives to the supposed designs of the new sect an importance out of all proportion to existing facts.

"However, my Nemesis," Fabian went on, "I speak only as an impartial observer. I have studied without adopting the opinions of the systems taught by various philosophers of note, being especially attracted by those who inculcated belief in a great First Cause, a Supreme God, such as Thales, Plato, and Socrates declared in sublime sentences. But a belief, to be perfect, must be consistent and coherent; and I should have been carried away by their grand conceptions, had I not observed, in time, that they did not give a supreme worship to this Supreme Deity of whom they wrote such golden sentences, but still offered prayer and sacrifice to the gods. When I read the last grand utterances of Socrates, it was with bated breath; every faculty of my mind was elevated to his own divine heights, until, holding the poisoned cup to his lips, he said, as with his last breath: 'Sacrifice for me a black cock to Æsculapius.' It was like a falling star—a bright trail of splendor across the heavens—then darkness!

"After that I determined to disturb my mind no more with abstract questions, and adopted the principle taught by Pyrrho, that tranquillity of mind is the greatest happiness, and can only be attained by universal doubt and absolute indiffer-

ence to all dogmas and opinions. In this spirit I have investigated, whenever and wherever an opportunity offered, both Judaism and Christianity, and many remarkable facts connected therewith in our own Roman traditions. But I would not weary thee, my Nemesius," said Fabian, with one of his winning smiles; "with the old frankness of our boyish days, bid me hold my tongue if I tire thee."

"No, by Fidius! Thou hast led me into a labyrinth, and must now lead me out. I have lived more in camps than among philosophers, and in the intervals have had no taste to follow the vagaries of speculative minds. I have accepted things as I found them, and worship the gods of my fathers in the belief that all who refuse them the same homage are enemies of the State. Say on, then, all that thou wilt, my Fabian; for it may be that another such hour as this will never be ours again. Let it be sacred to the friendship which is as ready to bear as to love," replied Nemesius, in tones whose sincerity none might doubt.

"It *is* a labyrinth!" exclaimed Fabian, with a smile strangely unlike the genial one that usually wreathed his lips—"a labyrinth in which I myself should be lost did I venture to penetrate too far into its mysterious involutions. But, while the pursuit has had its own peculiar interest, Pyrrho's system has been the sedative that saved me from all agitation of mind, and



insidious entanglements in the meshes of the sophistical beliefs I have encountered. Sacred indeed, my Nemesis, be this hour to friendship; but I will not accept the shadow thou wouldst cast over it by the suggestion of a possibility that it may be the last one of unrestrained confidence we shall ever spend together."

"It will be as the Fates decree," replied Nemesis, gravely. "Now, tell me what came of thy eccentric quest?"

"Thou knowest what a wanderer I have been, and that wherever I am, I have an irresistible impulse to acquire an insight into the history, laws, and customs of the strange peoples whose countries I visit, by which means I also gather many curious traditions. I have found human nature and history everywhere repeating themselves, and no wiser to-day for the blunders and tragedies of yesterday. One fact, however, impressed me as of paramount importance, because of its dominating influence over all else; and that is, the religious aspect of the world, which is governed by two antagonistic systems—the first polytheistic, powerful, extensive, and swaying the greater part of mankind; the second a small minority, consisting of Jews and Christians, who acknowledge and adore only one Supreme God, whom they assert to be the Creator of all things.

"This small antithetical element," Fabian went on, "might be despised as a contemptible

foe, too weak to do mischief, were it not for certain remarkable predictions of divine inspiration—in the truth of which they implicitly believe—of a great, mysterious Power that will one day arise among them, who will not only overthrow and destroy the ancient order of things, but bring the whole world under His dominion. I had always known in a vague way, from gleaning among old volumes, that some such predictions have existed from the remotest times; but our modern conquests, which have brought us in nearer relations with the Jews, and the Christians who are derived from them, have revived these dimly foreshadowed prophecies in a more definite manner; and I resolved to make an effort to ascertain if they were founded on superstitious illusions, or owed their origin to the secret theurgic schools in Egypt, or to a theosophy more exalted but dimly understood. I considered that the time devoted to the elucidation of a question of such grave import to the peace of the world and the higher interests of mankind, would be well spent, and my thirst for information be also gratified. I might fall short of my aspirations—I counted on that—but I knew I should gain much that was interesting by the way.

“In pursuit of my object, I went to Judea, bearing a letter of introduction from a mutual friend to the Roman Governor at Jerusalem, which explained that I was in quest of information relating to the ancient history of the coun-

try, which would be greatly facilitated by an acquaintance with some Hebrew of learning. I was most cordially received and treated with elegant hospitality by the Governor, who introduced me to an edile, a learned Jew,—one of the few who held office under the imperial authority. With a natural doubt of the purpose of my inquiries, knowing me to be a Roman of rank, he was at first, although courteous, very reserved; but placed in my hands some historic scrolls written by one Flavius Josephus (a Jewish prince of the Asmonæan family), in which he said I would find matters of interest connected with my researches.

“Later on, seemingly convinced that I had nothing sinister in view, the edile unbent, disclosing, as through the open door of a shrine, the deathless glow of a sacred passion for his faith. He told me many wonderful things concerning the omnipotence of the Supreme God of his belief in behalf of His people Israel—as he expressed it—meaning the Jews. He related with dramatic eloquence how this Almighty One had scourged Egypt with frightful plagues for the deliverance of Israel from the oppressive tyranny of Menethus, fourth king of the nineteenth dynasty,\* who held them in a captivity as degrading as it was cruel; and how at length, under the guidance of a divinely appointed leader—one Moses, an Egyptian Jew—He opened

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\* The Pharaoh.

a path through the Red Sea, by which they escaped, dry shod, towards the land their God had promised them; while Menethus and his army of chariots and horsemen, in hot pursuit, dashed into the abyss, supposing it to be as safe for them as for the Israelites, expecting to overtake and reduce them to a worse captivity than the first; but no sooner were they in the midst, than the waters, which were uplifted like walls on either side, suddenly closed over and engulfed them in the deep, from which none escaped to tell the tale.

“An account of these wonderful events,” continued Fabian, “was found inscribed on tablets of stone among the historic archives of Egypt when that country fell under the dominion of Rome, and was brought away with the other spoils, and deposited in the Imperial Library of Augustus, where they are still preserved; and I digress from my story to speak of them, because they corroborate the Hebrew version of the affair, except that the Egyptian historian imputed it to sorcery, in the arts of which he declares their leader was well versed. I had read the Egyptian tablets, and ascribed the wonder to some unexplained natural phenomena, which is one thing; but to hear of it from one who looks upon all that happened as an interposition of divine power and wrath, is another, that leaves the question open to doubt. I must confess, however, that the latter impressed, without convincing me.

“It would consume too much time, my Neme-  
sius, if I should repeat all the remarkable things  
my Hebrew friend related to me concerning the  
founding of the kingdom of Judea—the glory of  
its theocracy, the wisdom of its judges, the  
splendor of the great Temple at Jerusalem, where  
their Supreme Deity held converse with the  
high-priests; of the warlike and undaunted char-  
acter of the people; and, overshadowing all, sup-  
porting, defending all, the Omnipotent Power  
that had led and established and preserved them  
by such signal manifestations of His protection,  
that the polytheistic nations, hearing the fame  
thereof, like our own Marcus Aurelius, dreaded  
His wrath, and raised altars to the ‘Unknown  
God’ in their cities and temples. Ptolemy Phil-  
adelphus, of Egypt, sent a magnificent table of  
gold to enrich the Temple at Jerusalem; the  
kings of Asia offered costly treasures; and the  
Empress Livia, in later times, sent superb vases  
of gold, in her name and that of Augustus, to  
beautify its holy places, and propitiate Him who  
dwelt within its Tabernacle.\*

“But, having waxed strong and mighty, the  
men of Judea wearied of their theocracy: they  
wanted a human sovereign, who would enlarge  
their kingdom and exalt their fame by new con-  
quests. Their God granted their desire, and in  
the king of their selection they found their

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\* Josephus.

Nemesis; for from that time began their national misfortunes ending in defeats, captivity in Babylon, and their dispersion. Two or three intervals of prosperity under great kings, a period of warlike achievements under a great general, Judas Maccabeus, raised their hopes of yet making Judea the ruler of nations; but their decadence had begun, and their God, although He did not withdraw Himself from them, interposed no more miracles, but left them to their own devices, until—we all know the story—their conquest, begun by Pompey, ended in their final subjection by Titus.

“‘Our God has not abandoned us forever,’ said my friend, after dwelling briefly on the calamities of his country; ‘but only for a time. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, and His word never fails. From the beginning He has promised us One, whom, when the time of our sorrow is accomplished, He will send for the redemption and glory of Israel.’ He spoke in low, sad tones, his eyes half closed, and as if forgetful of my presence.

“‘This was the touchstone I was in search of, and I quickly, perhaps abruptly, asked:

“‘Are there no signs indicated by which the time of the coming of this Expected One may be known?’

“‘The time approaches as foretold,’ he briefly answered.

“‘Some say He has already appeared,’ I suggested.

“But a leaden reserve closed his lips. I saw that he was deeply disturbed, and when he spoke again, it was to ask me some question quite foreign to the subject. After conversing a little while, I rose to take leave, and thanked him most cordially for the information he had imparted in our several interviews. I did not see him again, although I went to his house, where I learned that he had been called away from Jerusalem on official business. Leaving Jerusalem, I journeyed up to Syria, spent a few days at Antioch, visited Daphne, that old Elysium of the senses and passions, where I sought the Oracle of Apollo, once so famous, but which, like all the other oracles, has been dumb these many years.

“Leaving Antioch,” continued Fabian, “I travelled leisurely in advance of my retinue, intending to embark at Laodicea, and return to Rome *via* Cyprus and Brundusium. The soft Syrian air, full of the resinous odors of cedar and pine, the mountain roads bordered with wild roses and oleanders, interspersed with tall white lilies, imparted a delicious sensation of repose favorable to reflection, and my thoughts involuntarily reverted to the theme which had taken such strong possession of my imagination. I then remembered that in my conversation with Laban, of Jerusalem, while he dwelt much and eloquently on the omnipotence of his God, and the glories of Israel, he had made no reference

whatever to the One known as the 'Desired of Nations,' until our final conference, as I have related,—a reserve I could not then understand.

"However, I had heard rumors that the sacred books of the Hebrews contained many distinct predictions relating to One of royal lineage, who would be born of a Virgin for the regeneration and glory of mankind, over whom He would reign; and that even the time of His appearance had been computed by their seers from the remotest days. But while this has been undoubtedly their hope and their boast, which the darkest fate can not extinguish, the potentates and powers of the world, remembering the wonderful manifestations of their Omnipotent God in their behalf, are troubled with a secret dread—a jealous fear lest He should fulfil these predictions to their own destruction; for it is well known to them that not only the Hebrews, but all the polytheistic nations of the world, hold traditions which dimly foreshadow and symbolize the same personage.

"Thibet and Sereca,"\* said Fabian, "had a thousand prophetic traditions of a virgin-born, divine prince. Zerdhucht,† the great seer of the Magi, was born of a virgin, and was at first believed to be the Expected One; but he was only

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\* China, which first sent ambassadors to Rome in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar.

† Zoroaster



a prototype, a great teacher of divine maxims, and founded a sect which had for its fundamental rule a pure life. The Brahmins taught that when a god assumes human flesh, he is conceived by divine operation in the womb of a virgin. The Egyptian Isis was a virgin-mother. Nemroud, having learned by his astrologers that a Child unborn threatened his throne and his gods, caused all pregnant women to be put to death. The Isis of the Druids in Gaul—it was predicted by their oracles—would bring forth the future Saviour and Regenerator of the world, and they erected altars in their sacred groves to this Virgin Mother and her divine Son. The incarnation of a God in the womb of a virgin is one of the fundamental doctrines of Asia.

“There are many other instances, of which those I have named are a few; but as remarkable as any are the predictions of the Sibyls. Thou knowest that the office of keeper of ‘Secret Historic Records’ has attached to my family ever since the time of the Cæsars. My ancestor Tullius was one of the *quindecimviri* who had charge of the three Sibylline books, procured from an extraordinary woman by Tarquin the Proud; they were said to contain the fate of Rome, and were kept in a chest of gold under the pedestal of the Palatine Apollo. Whenever these volumes were removed or examined—for they had an eventful history—those charged with the task retained in their memory much of their singular contents, difficult to be understood.

“One day, in looking over some ancient family records, which had been given over to obscurity and dust, I found copies in cipher of some of the Sibylline predictions, alike with all the rest, of a Virgin who would bear a Child of divine paternity, under whose sceptre all the nations would gather. I remember a few of these predictions, but the substance of them all agrees on this point. The oldest of the Sibyls—there were twelve—she of Chaldæa, named Sametha by the Hebrews, and said to be of the race of Noe—not only foretold all that would happen to Alexander of Macedon, but also predicted the coming of a Prince, born of a Virgin, who would restore the pristine glories of the Golden Age. The Cumæan Sibyl, in one of her inspired frenzies, foretold the coming of the same mighty Being, who would erect His throne on earth, and bring all men under His subjection. The poet Virgil has woven the utterances of the Sibyls in lofty verse.

“These mysterious women lived in ages and countries remote from each other, and yet their predictions of this divine Child, incarnate in human virginal flesh, all coincide—a coincidence worthy the consideration of philosophers and astrologers; and is a fact which, in my opinion, proves that all these traditions have a common origin, and were retained by the scattered families of the earth when they founded their national existence. It is a curious study; but I

will not waste time in conjectures, which prove nothing.

“The last we hear of these female seers, is of the Sibyl Tiburtina, in the reign of Augustus Cæsar, when a singular event occurred, which was authenticated by thousands of witnesses, and solemnly recorded. The Roman people, having determined to deify Augustus, went to seek advice of the Sibyl at her altar on the Capitoline Hill. After waiting there, fasting three days, the Emperor himself being present, her voice was heard, speaking in loud, distinct tones, many mysterious words of One to come—a Son of God; and suddenly the heavens opened, and Cæsar beheld a beautiful Virgin, in whose arms reposed a lovely Infant. At this apparition he fell upon his face affrighted; at which instant a voice from heaven was heard saying, ‘This is the altar of the Son of God.’”\*

“A pretty illusion of an over-excited imagination,” said Nemesius, with an incredulous smile.

“It may be so,” replied Fabian; “but the illusion was shared by thousands of people, waiting there to hear what she might say about the

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\*The history of the Twelve Sibyls was published in *The Ave Maria* in 1869, transcribed from an old black-letter book printed in England early in the 16th century, which—it was evident from a faded but distinctly-written inscription over the title-page—had belonged to the celebrated Heywood Library. It is known to be the only copy extant in this country. I had the use of it through the kindness of the gentleman to whom it belongs.

deification; and the event is recorded as a fact. Shortly afterwards Augustus erected on the spot an altar to this wonderful Virgin and her divine Son.\* And it was known about this time that certain Roman philosophers and augurs were troubled in mind, and whispered their belief that Nature was in travail to bring forth the divine Prince, whom they called the 'Desired of the Nations.'"

"I could laugh at thy pursuit of shadows, if thou wert not so deeply in earnest," said Nemesius, throwing away a small acorn that had dropped among the folds of his toga from a bough overhead.

"I do not admit that it is a shadow I am pursuing," replied Fabian. "Individually, it will not affect me, whatever may be the result of my investigation; but when we ascertain that it has been the belief of the world from the remotest times, and gaining strength with time, that One is to appear who will overthrow all the kingdoms of the earth, and the gods with them, the question assumes a serious aspect, and naturally invites scrutiny. Thou hast just tossed a small

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\*The early Christians, after Constantine, built on the site of this heavenly vision the Church of the Ara Cœli, which, by late accounts from Rome, the modern despoilers of the patrimony of the Church have ordered to be pulled down, to make room for the tomb and body of Victor Emanuel, in whom, as shown by his acts while living, the spirit of the persecuting emperors, such as Valerian, was revived.—A. H. D.

trifle away, yet it is the germ of a mighty tree, which will outlive centuries. Truth that is of divine inspiration is deathless, but difficult to find; and the search for it is not idle, even should the quest fail. But I will not quote Seneca's maxims: I have enough to say without them. It is my nature to pursue to the end anything that engages my interest, whether it be shadow or substance; and as I do not confine myself to generalities, I learn much that is valuable concerning other things."

"Thou wilt have to admit that, so far, the predictions concerning this Expected One are unfulfilled. I fear thou wilt have joined the immortals without realizing their truth or falsity, unless by some occult power thou canst penetrate the dim, distant future," answered Nemesius.

"Would it surprise thee to hear that He has already come?" asked Fabian.

A strange shock thrilled Nemesius into silence. Was it a chill drift of air from the Tiber, or had a spirit passed? Fabian, all unconscious of the effect of his words, continued:

"Such is the belief of many; but there is a conflict of opinion, with so good a show of reason on either side—for and against—that time alone can decide the question. Thou wilt think I chose strange associates. I do, whenever they offer a promise of new ideas, or a confirmation of old ones. I have shown thee, my Nemesius, that my late quest originated in my studies

of certain old historic records to which I had access, which found confirmation in the predictions of the Sibyls and the Hebrew traditions, so far as I have been able to trace them; but an opportunity to investigate the latter most unexpectedly presented itself.

“While I was absent in Syria our august Emperor was seized with a sudden attack of bloody piety, the fever of which seemed to increase instead of abating. Thou knowest how my life was saved on my voyage from Cyprus by Eleazer ben Asa, the Jew, and how I was sheltered and nursed back to health in the family of one of his relations, who lived among the beautiful hills a few miles distant from Brundisium. It was in this sequestered spot, in daily intercourse with this singular man, that my gratitude for his most disinterested kindness ripened into friendship. I found him not so reticent as Laban, of Jerusalem. He was an enthusiast of heroic mind in all relating to his belief, and especially in the promise of the Supreme God he adored—of the coming of that wonderful Prince so long expected by the world, who would lift up Israel from her fallen estate. He showed me the sacred, prophetic books of the Hebrews—those books which the great Alexander had sent ambassadors to Judea to obtain translations of into Greek, by seventy Hebrew scholars who were masters of that tongue, to be preserved among his treasures.

"Ben Asa pointed out and interpreted to me the most remarkable of the predictions concerning the royal warrior Messiah, who would restore with thousandfold splendor the departed glories of Israel, and extend its borders to the ends of the earth. It was not for me to contradict him, or interpose arguments against the only hope of a fallen nation. And why should I? It was their business, not mine. There was, however, one prediction that did concern me as a Roman citizen; for it foretold not only the fall of Judea seven hundred years before its kingdom was founded, but also the destruction of the Roman Empire before it existed; both events to happen about the same period.

"This prophecy was the emanation of a great astrologer from the Euphrates, who was bribed by the King of Moab to curse the Israelites;\* but, forbidden to do so by a wonderful manifestation from their God, he refused to obey the royal mandate. It was on the heights of Phogor, in the midst of the sacrifices prepared for the malediction, that he not only predicted the fall of Moab, the rise of a Star out of Jacob, and a sceptre that should spring up from Israel to rule the nations, but also foretold that Rome would then be at the height of its greatest power; then it would overcome the Assyrians, and waste the Hebrews, then itself perish. As Rome has, to all intents and purposes, wasted Judea, and

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\* Numbers, xxiv.

blotted it out from among the nations, and is now at the height of its greatest power, have not the Jews good reason to believe—from their standpoint of faith—that the advent of their Deliverer is at hand? And as all the prophetic words uttered by the sorcerer from the Euphrates concerning the Roman conquests have been verified, is there not reason why Rome should renew her vigilance, lest the end he predicted be accomplished?

“One day, just before we parted, and in our last conversation on the subject, I asked Ben Asa if it might not be possible that the *Christus* was the Expected One?

“‘By what sign?’ he asked; ‘what has he done for Israel, except to bring deeper calamities upon it? Did he appear as a king—was his life that of a conqueror? Was he not a seditious man, and did he not die as a malefactor upon the cross? No! we utterly reject him. When the true Goël \* appears, it will be in power and magnificence such as pass the imagination of man to conceive,’ he answered, proudly.

“Some months later I went down by sea to Syracuse, to look at some treasures of gems and statuary recently unearthed, of which I had heard. I was directed to one Aquilla as the factor of the business. He was a dealer in antiques, and a venerable man, of great learning and virtuous life, whose reputation for integrity in his

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\* The Hebrew Saviour.



dealings was never questioned. He was a Hellenic Jew, and, as I discovered later, a convert to Christianity—another opportunity provided for me by Destiny. I at once established friendly relations with him. There was no need to affect respect, for he had already won mine; and, as soon as reserve was banished, I questioned him as to the things imparted to me by Ben Asa. He confirmed all, reading the same predictions to me from a Greek translation of the sacred books of the Hebrews. There was no difference.

“‘And thou art yet patiently waiting in expectation of the coming of this Desired One? His advent is veiled in futurity: how canst thou be sure He will ever come?’ I asked.

“‘Because the days are accomplished, and He has already come,’ he answered, raising his eyes, which glowed with light, towards heaven.

“‘By what signs dost thou know it?’ I asked.

“‘By the fulfilment of all the prophecies, in very particular, concerning Him.’

“‘Is it He who is called the *Christus*?’

“‘It is He, indeed and in truth—Jesus Christ, born of a Virgin Mother—the Son of the Living God,’ he answered, bowing his head reverently.

“He believed it. I felt no interest in it beyond the desire to follow out a strange history to the end, but questioned him further. The *Christus*, then, for whom the deluded people still give their lives, was born in the twenty-sixth year of the reign of Cæsar Augustus, of a Virgin,

at a place called Bethlehem, in Judea. Rome, having reached the meridian of power and magnificence, was then at peace with all the world, which verified another prediction that He should be called the Prince of Peace.

“Wonderful events attended His birth, and His life was spent in teaching virtue, reproofing vice, and working miracles. He called Himself the Son of God: the Jews called Him a blasphemer. He announced Himself their King, and they called Him a seditious man, rejecting Him with scorn and hatred as an impostor, because He did not come in great power and splendor to restore the temporal empire of Israel. They accused Him to Pilate, the Roman Procurator of Judea, and demanded His death by crucifixion, threatening, if he refused to pass sentence, to appeal to Cæsar—for had He not publicly declared Himself King of the Jews, therefore an enemy to Cæsar? This was skilfully done, for although the Procurator—evidently a humane man—after examining the *Christus*, had declared to the high-priests and people that he found no just cause why He should be put to death, he was a Roman holding authority under Cæsar, and had need to be careful how he condoned any show of treason against him. He wavered, and at last consented with reluctance to pass sentence, after which the Jews, having insulted, scourged and crowned their victim with thorns, crucified Him.

“But such wonders attended His death as were never before witnessed upon earth. Nothing of all that Dion Cassius and Pliny have written about the destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum can compare with the horrors that attended the deicide. The sun was darkened—not by clouds, for some astrologers who were in Jerusalem, and observed the spectacle, declared that only its disc lost its effulgence. There were horrible sounds in the air; the earth was shaken to its centre; rocks split in a way contrary to the laws of nature; the veil of the great Temple at Jerusalem was rent in twain; and—oh, horrible!—the dead arose from their graves, and showed themselves to the living, conversing with them for many days. It was as if the end of all things were at hand.

“When the convulsions of nature ceased, the *Christus* was dead upon the cross, and they buried Him in a sepulchre in the rock, sealing the stone, and placing Roman guards to watch the tomb; for He had said that after three days He would rise again. Thou knowest the fidelity of Roman sentinels, and the penalties inflicted should seals with Cæsar’s head upon them be broken when they are on guard. But, notwithstanding all the precautions named, the *Christus* arose, as He had said, on the third day, and after forty days ascended into heaven, in sight of many who were with Him.

“All these things,” continued Fabian, “as I

afterwards ascertained, are narrated in the records sent by the Procurator Pilate to the Senate of Rome—as is the custom when extraordinary events occur in the Roman provinces—and were placed among the Judean archives, in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar.

“I remember having asked Aquilla: ‘If the Jews rejected the *Christus* for not fulfilling their expectations of temporal sovereignty and conquest, how can the Christians, who believe in the same Supreme God, and in the prophecies, accept Him?’

“Because we know that He meant a spiritual kingdom, and not a temporal one, and that all nations would submit to the empire of the Cross. When He acknowledged to Pilate that He was a King, He said His kingdom was not of the earth. We accept Him as the promised Messiah—the very Son of God, the Saviour and Redeemer of the world, who took upon Himself our human nature, that in His own person He might suffer all these things—a victim and propitiation for our salvation. And it is for the faith we have in Him, and the love we bear Him and His Virgin Mother, and the hope of eternal life that He purchased for us, that we lay down our lives rather than give up one jot or tittle of the faith that is in us. The oracles were silenced at His birth, and the false gods will continue to fall before Him, until all mankind acknowledge Him as their Redeemer and their God.’

"These were the man's words, Nemesis; and they gave me some insight into the exalted fervor and enthusiasm of the Christians; for their belief whatever may be its errors, inspires them with the most extraordinary heroism and fortitude when they are made to suffer for it—a thing now of daily occurrence."

"I should call them fanatics; but hast thou followed thy clue to the end?" asked Nemesis.

"No," said Fabian; "the end lies in the future. Ben Asa clings to his rendition of the prophecies, through humiliation, degradation, and daily perils of death. Aquilla believes as firmly that all prophecy is fulfilled in the *Christus*, and is ready to yield his life for his faith. Which of the two types is right? If the Christians are exterminated, then the *Christus* is a myth; but, by the gods! they thrive on the persecutions; it is like threshing out seed for new harvests every time. And to crown my types comes Evaristus, the synthesis of the two. *Eheu!* I flattered myself that I was impervious to pain; but this blow found the vulnerable spot, and I confess myself wounded. And what will Evaristus gain in exchange for all he has lost?"

"Heaven!" was the answer; but whence? It was like an aerial echo, so clear and sweet that both men started, looked at each other, then around, but saw no living thing, except a young slave, some distance away, who was tying up the carnations near a statue of Flora.

"An illusion!" laughed Fabian. "It is not to be wondered at that one should now and then float in the air, when the earth is so full of them. It sounded like the voice of Evaristus; may it be a good omen for him! Thou hast listened patiently, my Achates, to my long, discursive talk, which has, in a way, cooled the fever of my mind, even though it had no special interest for thee: for which accept my thanks."

"I have followed the thread, Fabian, and can but regard its coincident facts as remarkable; but that is all, except that I must compliment thee on thy faculty for investigation," answered Nemesius.

"Investigation which is without definite conclusion. But how delicious the repose here has been! The soft, drifting clouds, touched with purple and gold, tell how long we have loitered. It is time to think of leaving, but never have I felt so reluctant. Let us delay our departure a few moments, Nemesius; for I have just be-thought myself of something curious. Hast thou ever heard of the martyrs of Tiberius Cæsar,—not despised Christians, but noble Roman senators, devout worshippers of the gods, whom he sacrificed to the *Christus*?"

"Incredible!" exclaimed Nemesius; "an absurd slander!"

"An historic fact, by Fidius! not more strange than true; but listen. The *Christus* was born in the reign of Augustus, and in the nineteenth

year of that of Tiberius He was crucified. The memory of this Cæsar is not a savory one, for all the vices centred in him. His excesses brought on a loathsome leprosy, for which no skill could afford relief; he was pronounced incurable. He heard, through the reports of the Roman officials in Jerusalem, of a wonderful Man who had appeared, called the *Christus*—a Nazarene—who healed all manner of diseases, and even raised the dead to life. A desperate hope seized him. Why should not he also be cured? He could not go to Jerusalem, but the great Healer should be brought to him. He appointed three ambassadors, and, loading them with gifts for the *Christus*, directed them to bring Him with all honor to Rome; but when they arrived at Jerusalem, they learned that He had been crucified. Knowing how enraged Tiberius would be by the disappointment, they procured from Pilate a verified copy of the official records relating to His arrest, trial, death, and many other things that had taken place.\*

“However, when his messengers returned, and related the unsuccessful result of their errand, presenting the records they had brought in confirmation thereof, the Emperor’s fury was ungovernable. His first act was to order the arrest of the Procurator, Pontius Pilate; his next was to summon the Senate to Rome. Wondering what

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\* See Appendix.

extraordinary event impended, the Senators came from their beautiful villas around Rome, from far and near, and convened on the appointed day. Tiberius, a gross mass of diseased flesh, whose disgusting appearance the imperial purple failed to conceal, arose from his curule chair before the Senate, holding a scroll in his hand, which he proceeded to unroll and read to them. It was the document received from Pilate, containing an account of the *Christus*, and His cruel death, including much that was marvellous.

“Having finished, and rolled up the scroll, the Emperor demanded that the wonderful Nazarene should be deified by the Senate, and placed among the gods. Imagine the consternation of that august body at a proposal so preposterous! He left the subject to their deliberation, without a doubt of the result; for the Senate alone had the power of conferring divine honors on the dead. But they refused to comply, saying they would not recognize as a god a man whom some of the subjects of the Empire invoked as divine, without their consent. He was a divinity who would not hold fellowship with their gods. It was unbecoming the dignity of the Roman Senate to recognize as a god a man who had been put to death as a malefactor in one of the provinces. The rage of Tiberius nearly cost him his life; and those Senators who had the courage to protest against his wish, were seized, and the next morning precipitated from the parapets of



the Sublician Bridge, to find their graves in the muddy depths of the Tiber.\*

"Thus did the gods offer tribute to the *Christus*. Now I have done, and am ready to go, after I gather a handful of Damascus roses and some carnations for Claudia," said Fabian, willing to spare his friend the trouble of another word, being himself a little weary of the subject.

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\*This is related with dramatic effect by the Rev. A. J. O'Reilly, D. D., in his "Victims of the Mamertine."

## CHAPTER XIV.

PAGAN GRIEF—ONCE MORE AT HOME—  
A SENSATION.

EARLY next morning, just as Fabian was preparing to go to the villa for the purpose of arranging a pretty device he had thought of for Claudia's welcome home, a servant appeared, and announced that a person was waiting in the vestibule—who said his business was urgent—and requested to see him. Fabian had been expecting ever since he awoke that morning, to get some intelligence from the agent whom he had commissioned to ascertain where Evaristus was incarcerated, and, if possible, to save him; he was not surprised, therefore, to see the lawyer himself, whom he received with grave courtesy, while his countenance expressed a questioning anxiety, of which he was scarcely conscious.

After both were seated at a table of carved citrean wood, upon which lay scattered implements of writing, and unanswered letters, with one or two volumes of favorite authors, the lawyer, without any preliminaries, entered at once on the business which had brought him. He related briefly that he had lost no time in entering

upon a careful search for Evaristus. What made it so difficult, was the great number of persons that had been arrested at the same time, and a certain secrecy which had been thrown around his arrest, on account of the popular sentiment in his favor. The lawyer stated that he did not succeed in discovering to which of the prisons he had been conveyed until after midnight, when he at once directed his efforts, by application to the proper officials, to procure access to him. This involved a delay of several hours; and when at last, near day-dawn, the speaker found his way to the prison, and showed the order for his admission, he was informed that he was too late: Evaristus had been executed. The best thing they could do, after receiving a secret bribe, was to direct him to the place where the offender had paid the forfeit of his life.

"Here," added the lawyer, "I was not too late. It is true he was past recall, but I learned the particulars of his end. They first bound him on the wheel of torture, but before setting it in motion they tore out his tongue with red-hot pincers—"

"Enough!" interrupted Fabian, raising his hand from the table on which it rested, and dropping it again, while a sick faintness nearly suspended the action of his heart.

"I secured his body," began the other, "supposing—"

"That is well. It is what I would have most

desired, all else having failed," Fabian quickly responded.

"What disposition shall we make of it?"

"Deposit it in my family tomb on the Appian Way," said Fabian, opening a cabinet, and taking therefrom a bronze key, which he gave him.

"This will open it."

"Thy request shall be faithfully attended to; but shall the remains be incinerated? I can have it done secretly, if such be thy wish."

"No," said Fabian, remembering to have heard, among other things, that the Christians did not burn the bodies of their dead, and inurn their ashes for burial. "No: there is a new coffin of Assian stone there. I bought it when I was at Assos in Troas, two years ago, intending it for my own interment. The stone has peculiar properties, from which one does not shrink as from the flame, although both consume.\* Evaristus was my friend, and to give him his last couch is all that is left for me to do. Spare no expense for fine linen, spices, or whatever may be needed. There may be danger in carrying out my wishes; should it be so, the fee shall be in proportion to it."

"Thy instructions shall be obeyed to the letter," answered the lawyer, fixing a look of keen

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\*It has been said that the Assian stone, much used by the ancients for sepulture, had the property of consuming the body forty days after interment, whence it received the name of *sarcophagus*—flesh-eater.

scrutiny on Fabian's face as he turned a moment to lay his hand on the head of his favorite dog—a gigantic hound—who had quietly entered and taken his station beside his master, fixing his great eyes, full of latent fire, upon the stranger with a questioning, threatening expression.

"I am satisfied, by what thou hast already done, that they will. Be quiet, Tito! A gentleman's dog should know his friend from a foe," said Fabian, grasping the brute's metal collar, as, growing restless, he crouched as for a spring.

Then Fabian and his visitor separated, the latter impressed with some strange ideas growing out of the interview. "Is it friendship only," he asked himself, "that induces this noble Roman gentleman, a worshipper of the gods, to give honored burial, among his own ancestors, to a martyred Christian? Or has he some secret motive, deeper and more sacred? Has the truth of Christianity, and the example of Evaristus, opened his eyes and touched his heart?" The man could not tell; he had dared ask no questions, for he was himself secretly a Christian—one of those who concealed their faith that they might better serve the suffering members of the persecuted Church—and lived in almost hourly expectation of being called upon to shed his blood in testimony of his faith. Was not this a living martyrdom of charity, as acceptable, if not so glorious, as the brief, sharp pangs of the rack, the fiery torture, and the fierce, sudden

agony, that as by a single blow changed the mortal struggle into an immortal triumph?

Left alone, the smothered emotions of Fabian's passionate Southern nature burst through all restraints, and in tones of blended rage and grief he exclaimed, bitterly:

"And is this the only reward Rome could find for thee, my Evaristus—to drag out thy eloquent tongue and shatter the silver trumpet that sounded her fame! Gods! *are* ye gods, to look down indifferently upon a crime like this?"

Grief was new to Fabian; he had flattered himself that the philosophy he had adopted held him above the discordant passions of life; but found, to his shame, that, like snow-crueted volcanic fires, they only waited the opportunity to burst into flames. He felt beaten by his own weakness, and thought a more lofty fortitude would have made his grief worthier of its object. He also realized for the first time how utterly futile and wasted is all conflict with the decrees of Fate. He had nothing that reached higher than his head to look to for comfort or help; there was nothing in the theories and apothegms of the philosophies he had studied that could give strength or solace to the troubled mind, or tranquillity to the fevered brain; so, pagan that he was, he relied upon the resources of his own noble nature to live out his life as best he could, while he buried his sorrow deep in the sacred places of memory.

Fabian plunged his head in a vessel of cold, perfumed water, and, throwing himself upon a couch, took up a volume, which proved to be his favorite "*Æneid*," and sought to regain his usual tranquillity in its noble and poetic conceptions; then, when conscious that his composure was entirely restored, he wrapped his toga about him, descended to the street, where his chariot still awaited him, quickly mounted, and drove to the villa on the Aventine.

About the same hour in which Fabian was passing through the ordeal just described, Nemesis had left Rome to make his daily visit to the camp of his legion, and, without an object—only that it was a delicious day, and he wished to prolong his ride—he took the Urban road along the Viminal. As he approached the house of Hippolytus, he could but contrast its present quiet with the uproar and strife that yesterday reigned in its neighborhood. The sun shone brightly on its grim tower, and touched with emerald sheen the ivy creeping over its dark walls; birds careered above it, glad under the blue sky and golden light; and odors of mingled sweetness filled the air with subtle incense.

There was a solitary old beggar, clothed in tatters, sitting on the lowest step of the portico, as if to rest and gain breath before resuming his journey. Nemesis thought he had never beheld so miserable an object; perhaps because he saw this one singly, without others around to divide

his attention. The mendicant's cheeks were hollow and pallid; his large black eyes, sunk far back in his head, were dim and wandering; while his hands were so palsied that the staff he clasped scarcely supported him.

Suddenly, from a door under the portico, a young slave appeared, with a small loaf of bread and some scraps of meat, which he hastily thrust into the beggar's hand, quickly covering them with his tattered cloak, whispered a few words, and was turning to go back into the house by the way he came out, when he was seized, pinioned, and dragged away by three men, who had followed him, and laid in wait to capture him as he returned. At the same moment two others laid violent hands on the beggar, who piteously pleaded for mercy.

Nemesius drew rein, and reminded the brutes that, the man being too old and feeble to offer resistance, such rough force was not necessary. "What is his offence?" he asked.

"Oh! kind sir," exclaimed the beggar, in quavering tones of weakness, "I have committed no offence. I am starving and blind; and my son, who, like myself, is a slave of Hippolytus, brought me some scraps of food that would have been thrown to the dogs. I lived past my usefulness, and went blind, and then I was turned out to beg my bread. Oh! sir, pity me!"

Blind! That had appealed direct to the heart of Nemesius, farther and deeper than all the



rest, which had simply touched his naturally humane instincts; for he thought of his own sightless one, and quickly said: "Release him to me; I will charge myself with his support."

"We dare not. He is the slave of Hippolytus. His son stole the food he gave him, and both will be punished for the crime," replied the leader, in rough, positive tones.

Nemesius knew that a Roman master held the power of life or death over his slaves, and that no man had the right to come between them and his authority; but beyond this—although owning several hundred slaves himself—he was not acquainted with the various methods by which their offences were usually punished, having deputed their management to a factor, and given himself no trouble concerning them.

"Will not his age and blindness procure some mitigation of his sentence?" he asked. "But where is Hippolytus? I will speak to himself: he knows me."

"He has gone to Rome; the Emperor sent for him this morning; and it would be of no use if he were here, he is so enraged at the outbreak of yesterday. This old rogue will be starved to death, or cast from the tower of the Esquiline,\* whichever Hippolytus decides. He and his thief of a son can comfort each other in the dungeons below. Come! get along, old wretch! We've wasted time enough already."

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\* One of the punishments inflicted on refractory slaves.

But the miserable old creature was so paralyzed by terror, hunger, and age combined, that on attempting to move he fell. The man seized him roughly, bore him down into the cavernous, gloomy dungeons, where the refractory slaves were manacled, and, throwing him upon the rugged floor of rock, they left him to die or recover, as Fate might decree.

Nemesius touched the sides of his horse with the spur and galloped away, wondering where lay the fault of the times that could produce results like these. He had spent his life in camps, and in active military service in the foreign wars, and was ignorant of many things of civic polity, which excited his wonder when his observation was directed to them. He pitied the aged beggar, and would—for the love of his blind child—have given him refuge and support, but had been prevented by an arbitrary law. Then he remembered that, in the past, filial devotion had been more than once rewarded and immortalized by the Romans; that it was a virtue which ranked high in their ethics; and yet before his very eyes that day the virtue had been construed into a crime, to be followed by death instead of freedom and award. Truly, he thought, there must be more two-faced gods than Janus for such inconsistencies to rule, and the old sage Lentulus was right in declaring that the nobler qualities of the Roman character had fallen to decay.

The house of Hippolytus seemed destined, all

at once, to become the scene of extraordinary excitement; for towards noon another prisoner, guarded by soldiers, and attended by a jeering crowd, was conducted to its gloomy dungeons,—the same one Nemesius saw only yesterday, borne along by a furious mob, and consigned to the Mamertine—the Christian Deacon, Laurence; his dark eyes radiant now as then with ineffable joy, his beautiful face tinted by the warm suns of his native Spain, neither pallid nor affrighted, but glowing with the divine light from within.

It was to procure this transfer that Valerian had commanded the presence of Hippolytus, believing that, if placed in his power, the latter could, by means fair as well as foul, wrest from Laurence the secret as to where the treasures of the Christian Church were concealed, it having been reported that he held charge of them. He was to be offered life, and freedom, and honors, if he complied, and made the slightest sign of homage to the gods; if not, death by untold torments awaited him. Hippolytus, and the prefect who was instrumental in his arrest, were to share in the spoils, if success attended their efforts.

Unresisting, the Christian Deacon was urged on with brutal force, down steep, dripping stairways, along dark, narrow corridors, until the iron-plated door of the lowest dungeon, where the refractory slaves were confined, was reached; the grim turnkey opened it, and he was thrust

in among the furious, howling crowd, which in its impotent rage was ready to expend its violence on any new object that presented itself.

By the momentary glare of a torch as he entered—for, except a faint glimmer from a grating in the corridor outside, daylight was excluded—Lawrence saw a youth supporting on his breast and upholding in his strong arms an aged and apparently dying man. Suddenly the torch was extinguished; the great door clanged to; the heavy bolts were shot into their sockets; confused yells of despair and frightful imprecations arose within in a wild roar. But what cared soldiers or guards? It was all a thing of too common occurrence to disturb them in the least; they had obeyed orders, and it was for those who had broken the laws to suffer, not for them, who “meant to eat when hungry, rest when tired, and drink and be merry when their work was done.”

“Here let Thy servant reap some sheaves for Thee, O Christ!” was the prayer that ascended from the soul of the Deacon Laurence, as, moved with divine charity for the benighted creatures around him, he sank on his knees upon the flinty rocks to implore for them spiritual light, and mercy which they could not hope from man.

It required faith as divinely strong as that of Laurence to ask in hope the conversion of those ignorant, degraded, and idolatrous ones, who were more like ravening wolves than human

beings; but God has set no restrictions on what His servants shall ask, and has given His eternal word that as one's faith is, so shall it be done unto him; and the faith of Laurence was greater than a grain of mustard-seed—an infinitely small measure, but of power sufficient to remove mountains.

It was on this very day that the old Cæsius palace was closed, the day fixed for the lovely blind daughter of Nemesius to go back to her beautiful home on the Aventine. At the moment the chariot, which bore the Princess Vivia, Claudia and her faithful Zilla, reached the great bronze gates of the avenue, the sun was low in the west, the sky suffused with delicate drifts of color; a transparent, luminous mist pervaded the air; and the summits of the long mountain range, stretching southward, were crested with a shimmering line of gold. It seemed as if the heavens had garnered their loveliness wherewith to crown the dying day.

Fabian, who had spent a busy day at the villa, was waiting at the entrance of the avenue to receive them, with Grillo, around whose neck hung a huge garland of daisies and scarlet poppies, under which the silver bells of his collar jingled, and which he appreciatively tried to nibble at every opportunity.

Saluting the Princess with that suave, deferential manner in which he was so perfect, Fabian asked her permission to transfer Claudia from

her side to Grillo's back, to which she gave a kind, ready assent; whereupon he gently lifted her from the chariot, and placed her on the saddle. She was trembling with joy at being once more at home to stay; and to be met by Fabian, and actually seated on Grillo's back, proved such a realization of her dreams, that it made her almost gasp for breath. But this was not all; for, as if to crown her happiness, Nemesis now joined them, and, having cordially welcomed his guests, he dismounted to embrace and speak low, loving words to his darling, which were for no ear but her very own. Oh! the happiness of it—to be at home; to have around her the ones she loved best on earth; to feel the caressing touch of their hands, and hear their tender words! Then came the bitter thought, stinging her with sharp pain, that she could not see them for the darkness—the dreadful, oppressive darkness! But, as a bird covers its wound with its wing, so she folded over hers the soft wing of silence, not wishing the pain of her grief to reach the hearts so dear to her own.

"This is our Queen returned to her kingdom, my cousin the Princess," said Fabian, with his irresistible smile, to the Princess Vivia; "and, if it please thee, she will take the lead to-day."

"Let us have no ceremony whatever, Fabian; it would mar all my enjoyment of the unrivalled loveliness spread out around me, and which I now see for the first time. No wonder the child's

heart grew homesick! And it is as beautiful as the rest to see her on that mouse of a donkey, the like of which I never beheld," answered the Princess, beaming with smiles.

The little procession started, Claudia's hand in her father's as he walked beside Grillo, when Fabian, who was in advance, waved a branch of orange flowers over his head, at which signal a sudden shower of rose-leaves fluttered down upon them as if out of the sky; and at the same moment a choral peasant-song of welcome floated out from the tree-tops, filling the air with wild, sweet melody, which alternated with the clear tenor of the *choragus*, that was so flute-like in tone as to be distinctly heard from end to end of the avenue.

On every overreaching bough of the old chestnuts was perched one or more of the young slaves of the villa, in whose Southern hearts the love of music was an inherent gift, and a passion for anything spectacular as natural as the breath they drew. Each one was provided with a pannier of rose-leaves, and, having been drilled by Fabian, they performed their allotted parts with the most enthusiastic spontaneity. Wishing to make Claudia's welcome home one that she could most enjoy, he had devised this, which she could both feel and hear

"Oh, Fabian!" she exclaimed, as the fragrant snow of rose-leaves fell over her face and hands, "what is it fluttering down so lightly upon me?"

And those voices, and that *one* voice like a flute in the air!"

"They are in the air, my pretty one—some strange birds that I snared, which not only sing, but scatter rose-leaves to welcome thee back," he answered, laughing.

"Birds! Oh! Fabian, do birds sing verses?"

"Mine do," he replied; "and they shall sing for their little lady whenever she wishes."

"Oh! my father! how sweet it is to be here!" she said to Nemesisus, in soft, tremulous tones; then she laughed, and stretched out her hand to Fabian, which he bent over and kissed. "Thou art always so good to me, Fabian; and I love thee!" she added.

"Listen, Fabian!" exclaimed Nemesisus, as the sweet tenor of the *choragus* soared high up into the air like a lark; "it sounds like the voice we heard in the ilex grove yesterday."

"It does. I detect the same chord, the same tone. It is a rare voice. I heard him singing at his work the other day, and this little *scena* suggested itself. He is in some way related to Symphronius, as beautiful as a young Apollo; and his occupation is to keep the carnations in the gardens trained up and free from weeds."

"I knew they were not birds, Fabian!" laughed Claudia, who had listened with interest to the conversation.

"I meant their voices," he laughed back, ~~now~~ at a loss.



It was indeed the same voice they had so mysteriously heard in the garden. The boy was an orphaned great-nephew of Symphronius, and a Christian. His father, a pagan, had been a keeper in one of the prisons; but one day, on witnessing a certain martyrdom, he, suddenly enlightened by the grace of God; declared himself a Christian, and suffered. His wife followed his example later, and, like him, exultingly yielded her life for the faith that was in her. The boy, their only child, had been baptized, and was a catechumen at the time of his mother's martyrdom; and, being left entirely helpless and homeless, Symphronius had brought the lad to the villa, and got the gardener to set him to work. While tying up the carnations around the statue of Flora the day before, he was repeating to himself a Christian hymn, which so filled his heart with joy and hope, that, forgetting himself, the single word "Heaven" escaped his lips, reaching the ears of Nemesius and Fabian, as if in answer to the words of the latter. No one at the villa knew that the lad Admetus was a Christian, still less did any one imagine the changes that were passing in the mind of old Symphronius.

While we have been occupied by this little digression the showers of rose-leaves continued to descend, and the choral songs to fill the air, until the little blind daughter of the house and her adoring attendants reached the portico,

where Symphronius received them with his grandest air, his manner tempered, however, by the delight that glistened in his eyes, and crinkled his visage with smiles of welcome that would not be suppressed.

"I welcome thee, my cousin Princess, to my dear home," said Claudia, folding the hand of the Princess in both her own, and pressing her soft lips upon it. "I think thou wilt like it, the air is so sweet! And when I show thee all the beautiful places, and my doves, I hope thou wilt like it well enough to stay."

"I am sure that I shall, my dearest. I like it now. It is celestial!" said the Princess, kissing her young cousin, who had never before appeared so lovely to her.

Claudia was now within a few months of being ten years old: her birthday would come in October. She was well grown for her age, slender in form, yet sufficiently well-rounded for a graceful outline; and now, as she stood in a slant of golden light, her pale blue robe falling in soft folds to her feet; her long, shining curls floating over her shoulders; her face irradiated with the happiness of her return, and her great pathetic, kind eyes looking blankly out, it is no wonder that the Princess Vivia gazed admiringly upon her, and thought how wonderfully beautiful she was.

And so the old idyllic life at the villa on the Aventine was resumed, in all its material aspects

the same, the only change being in the blind girl herself—a change which to a casual observer was not apparent, but which her father and Zilla noticed with silent but exquisite pain. This was her ever-present consciousness of being blind, which she involuntarily betrayed in many ways, now by a sudden shrinking back when in motion, as from an impending blow, at another time impulsively stretching forth her hand, palm outward, as if to prevent contact with some impediment that would hurt her; and again in the timidity of her steps, which hampered the freedom of movement that had formerly given such attractive grace to her motions.

This new phase of his child's misfortune increased the poignancy of Nemesus' grief, and filled his mind with sad misgivings of her future; but he was impotent to remedy it—as impotent, he bitterly thought, as were the gods themselves, who had not made the least sign in answer to all the prayers and costly sacrifices that had been offered to propitiate their compassion and help.

The next day, mounted on Grillo, and accompanied by the Princess Vivia and Zilla, Claudia, in sweet content, wandered with them through the beautiful gardens, from one favorite spot to another; while the varied odors from spicy carnations, orange blossoms, Damascus roses, and violets seemed to welcome her presence with their incense. Along the shaded alleys and avenues, where the golden sunlight drifted and

flickered through tall, feathery pines, to the fountains, the grotto of Silenus, and the cascade, all steeped in the brightness of the Roman sky, they strolled and rested, and talked, until Symphronius appeared to announce that the prandial repast was spread *al fresco* in the ilex grove.

The Princess, charmed by the lavishness of beauty outspread around her, was gracious, and as genial as comported with experiences as sad as hers had been; but the great city lying below somewhat awed her by its size and splendor—she had not dreamed of its extent—and the more distant view she had caught of the Alban hills, where her old gray villa nestled among its groves, reminded her so vividly of her vineyards, her peasants, her chickens and olives, that for a few moments she felt quite homesick, but not enough so to impair her appetite, or make her indifferent to the luxuries which invited it.

While life at the villa that day was like a scrap out of the Golden Age, in the peace and beauty that filled it, the magnificent city below, standing out in its superb proportions, its lofty conceptions in marble, its temples, statues, capitol, and the stately palaces crowning its seven hills, bathed in sunshine, and almost tempting the belief that the gods who presided over its destinies had built it, was agitated by rumors of strange things that had just taken place at the house of Hippolytus. The place seemed all at once to have become the scene of exciting and wonder-

ful incidents, which formed the topic of conversation on the street, at the baths, the Forum, the theatre, and other public resorts; while like a strain of sweetest music it stole through the dark galleries of the Catacombs, making glad the hearts of the dwellers therein. In the great, sinful city above, men discussed what had happened with fury and dread; in the city of God, far down in the depths of the earth, it swelled into a holy song of triumph.

What, then, were the events that stirred Rome with a new sensation? Stripped of the false and malign rumors with which pagan superstition invested them, the simple facts—in reality miraculous manifestations of the Divine power—were as follows:

On the day previous, when Laurence, the Christian deacon, was cast into the dungeons of Hippolytus, the first object, as before related, that, by the flare of a torch, met his eye, was the old blind beggar and his son, who had preceded him by a few hours into those abodes of gloom. The sight of misery that it seemed impossible to connect with guilt, appealed instantly to the divine charity which inflamed his heart, and moved him to offer help and consolation not only to them, but also to the unfortunate slaves, whose violence and curses added to the horrors of the place; for nothing less than their conversion would satisfy his zeal.

His eyes presently grew accustomed to the dim

light that, from a distant window in the corridor, stole faintly through a small iron grating high up in the wall, and made the inmates of the prison look like dark, grotesque shadows. Approaching the blind beggar and his son, who still supported him on his breast, Laurence knelt upon the uneven, rock-hewn floor beside them, and in compassionate tones inquired the cause of their sorrow. Accents of human kindness were new to them, but now, when despairing of all help, and only certain of a horrible death, those low, thrilling tones of sympathy, those words expressive of pity, fell upon their ears like that strange music that sometimes visit the dreams of the wretched, their moans ceased, and they related the sad story with which we are already acquainted.

Laurence had not wherewith to appease their hunger; he could not give them freedom or life: but in burning words he imparted to their benighted minds the knowledge of Jesus Christ and all that He had suffered for their salvation; and with such unction did he speak, that, enlightened by the mysterious operation of divine grace, they believed.

The slaves, attracted by the strange voice that rang through the darkness above the tumult they were making—that uttered words such as they had never heard before—grew silent, then gathered as near as their chains permitted, to listen. At this moment the holy deacon, thirsting for their salvation, raised his eyes and arms towards

heaven, and, with faith nothing doubting, asked God, in the holy name of His divine Son, to open the sightless eyes of the old beggar, that those present, beholding the miracle, might believe in Him. Swiftly sped the prayer, to be as swiftly answered. A cry of joy announced that the blind eyes were opened, and rising up, his strength renewed like an eagle, the old man gave his testimony for Christ. His son also declared himself a Christian, and together they rejoiced; their bonds, the sad fate that awaited them, and the miseries of the past, all swallowed up and forgotten in the light of the new faith, and the eternal hope that had risen upon them out of the darkness.

Then Laurence addressed the slaves, who, having witnessed the miracle, stood grouped around, awed and silent, hearing for the first time of the true God, who had given His only-begotten Son to suffer unto death for their salvation, and of the eternal reward that awaited those who believed in Him. His words fell like refreshing rains on a thirsty land, which straightway yielded a miraculous harvest; faith and hope sprang up together in those hearts that had so long sat in darkness; they were Christians, who but an hour ago were worshippers of devils under the guise of gods—Christians, except that they were unbaptized.

There was no water; their prison allowance was drank up hours ago, and they would have no

more until the morrow. Suddenly a trickling, rippling sound was heard: a miraculous fountain had gushed from the flinty, rugged floor, settling in the uneven places in limpid pools, then losing itself in the darkness through some natural outlet. Filled with joy, and giving thanks, Laurence baptized his converts, twenty-three in number, including the old beggar and his son; then, all unwearied, he continued to instruct them in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, in language as simple as it was strong.

At sunset, the servants who came to bring food to the prisoners, instead of confused sounds of fury and malediction from these gloomy depths, which had before made them afraid to enter, heard now only sounds of rejoicing. They descended cautiously, and by the light of a torch borne by one of their number they beheld peaceful, smiling faces, instead of countenances distorted by rage and despair, and asked what had happened. The preaching of Laurence, the blind man's sight restored, the miraculous spring, their conversion to Christianity, were all told with joy that could not be repressed. Some questioned the old beggar, whom they had long known blind; others gazed at the fountain flowing where water had never been before; while some ran to inform Hippolytus of the wonderful things that had taken place.

Hippolytus, endowed by nature with many fine qualities, and by education a pagan, instead



of falling into a blind rage at the report, hastened with his family to investigate the remarkable events. The result was that the truth entered his soul; grace completed the triumph, and, throwing himself at the feet of Laurence, he asked to be made a Christian, and was baptized with all his family.\*

The morning after the events described had taken place, converting the dungeons of Hippolytus into the very gates of Heaven, Nemesius had gone early and been detained late at the camp of his legion, by some important details connected with the weapons of his soldiers, many of which he discovered were defective, and numbers of them useless for actual service. This was, in his opinion, a matter sufficiently important to require his personal and immediate attention, war being imminent at any hour, when it would be too late to remedy the evils of defective and inefficient arms, however brave the men who bore them. Determined that his command should not be found unprepared in the least particular, instead of returning to the villa he rode out to the Nomentian Gate, to see and give orders to a skilful artificer of military weapons, whose work-shops were in that quarter.

Having satisfactorily transacted the business that had brought him there, Nemesius remounted his horse, and was proceeding homeward, when a thunder-storm, which had been

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\* Acts of St. Laurence.

threatening all the sultry afternoon, burst over the city with unusual violence. It was dark, and he saw his way only by the vivid flashes of lightning that scored the blackness with veins of fire; the wind howled, and rain, mingled with hail, poured in floods from the riven clouds, when a broad white flash revealed just before him the massive arches of the Aqua Virgo, under one of which he immediately took shelter.

A few moments later, two men sought the same friendly refuge, and seated themselves on a block of travertine near where Nemesus stood leaning against his horse. Under these solid arches of stone the crashing sound of the thunder was deadened, and heard only in dull reverberations, and the two strangers began to converse with each other. One of them was a soldier, as the glint of the lightning on his armor revealed; the other a civilian, whose voice and speech indicated a person of education. They were talking of what had taken place the day before in the dungeons of Hippolytus; the soldier, who was on guard there at the time, being evidently well acquainted with the facts, while the tenor of their conversation declared them to be Christians.

When he related how the blind beggar had been restored to sight by the prayers of Laurence, Nemesus listened with keenest interest. Had he not seen him, and all the circumstances of his arrest, on the previous day, heard his pitiable

story, and himself pleaded for a mitigation of his punishment, before he was dragged away, and cast with his son into prison? Blind many years, and yet by the prayer of a Christian restored to sight! Then the other related how a child born blind had received sight, by the power of Jesus Christ, through the prayer of the holy Pope Stephen, and that the only son of the Senator M. Clodius had been raised from the dead by the same miraculous intervention. Light flashed into the heart of Nemesius, and with it the thought: "He by whose power such wonders are wrought must be in truth the Son of God. If He will give sight to my child, then will I too believe. But where shall I find this holy man Stephen?"

He was agitated by a thousand new emotions; the Spirit of God was moving over the darkened chaos of his soul, but he did not comprehend. That Hippolytus—knowing him so well as a devout worshipper of the gods, and not backward in persecuting the Christians when it fell in his way,—that Hippolytus and his family should have been suddenly converted, among his imprisoned, refractory slaves, to the new belief, by the influence and prayers of Laurence the Deacon, filled his mind with inexpressible amazement; but the miracle by which the blind beggar was restored to sight was what reached the innermost recesses of his heart. And then to hear that the Pope, Stephen, had given sight to a child born blind,

filled him with passionate longings, and made him willing to sacrifice earthly honors—riches, life, all, all—if he could obtain this coveted boon for his own Claudia.

The storm was subsiding; already faint glimpses of white moonlight shone through the cloud-rifts, and the men arose to go, when Nemesisus approaching them, said courteously:

“The storm drove us accidentally to the same shelter. I have, without intending to do so, overheard what ye have spoken of, and I would know how I may get speech of the holy man Stephen, of whom ye have related wonderful things.”

They saw by the gleam of his armor and his military bearing that he was an officer of rank, and, knowing that a price was set on the Pope’s head, they answered, reservedly: “We can not inform thee.”

“And yet the words I have just heard disclose the fact that ye are both Christians.”

“We are, by the grace of God, Christians,” they answered, firmly.

“Can it be that ye fear evil at my hands for Pope Stephen, that ye refuse the information I ask?”

“Thou art a stranger to us, and we know there’s a price set for his destruction.”

“Your mistrust is natural, but no evil shall reach him through me. I have heard the wonderful things ye have related of him, and I seek

him as a suppliant, to obtain a small share of the favors he gives so freely to the poor and the unfortunate—favors which gold can not buy, or I would have had my wish long ago," answered Nemesius, with the quiet dignity of truth.

The men hesitated, impressed by his manner and words, but felt it necessary to exercise caution. They whispered apart for a few minutes, then said:

"If thou wilt confide thy name to us, we may get a message conveyed from thee to our Holy Father, Pope Stephen, and find means by which his answer can reach thee."

"I am Nemesius, commander of the Imperial Legion, whose word once given is known to be held as sacred as a vow," he answered, proudly.

"That is what men say of thee. The Holy Father shall be informed of thy wish, and his answer shall be conveyed to thee without unnecessary delay," replied the one who had spoken.

"The communication can be sent to my villa on the Aventine. I am usually there morning and evening," said Nemesius.

"There shall be no failure. May the grace of God enlighten and bless thee! Farewell!"

"Farewell!" he responded, as they passed out of the shadow of the arch, their receding forms quickly lost sight of in a turn of the narrow street they had entered. "Aye! for the love of thee, my child, I will seek this Christian Pope, and at his feet, if need be, will implore him to

give thee sight. Thy innocence and thy misfortune will surely move him to pity."

Full of the new hope that had dawned upon him, Nemesis rode slowly homeward, while, like a low undertone, as of the echo of the sea in a shell, the question kept sounding with impressive insistence in the depths of his soul: "By whose power are these wonders wrought?"

He heard, but could not answer; he cared only for the accomplishment of his hope, let the power by which it was wrought be what it might. And when he reached home, and found Claudia waiting to welcome him, no pang shivered through his heart as he embraced her, and gazed into her blind eyes; his voice had a ring of gladness, and his countenance wore such an unusual expression of cheerfulness, that Zilla, who could read all its changes, thought, "He has heard good news," and thanked the gods for the happiness it diffused in their little circle that night.

The drill and equipment of his legionaries continued to occupy the attention of Nemesis, who was too thorough a soldier to relegate to subordinates details on which the efficiency of his command in the field would largely depend; and he had no time to cast more than a fleeting thought on his adventure at the Aqua Virgo, and the conversation that had passed between the two strangers and himself. But when, the day's duty over, he left the camp, and rode homeward through the quiet, beautiful subur-

ban ways, it all recurred to him—their words, the vivid hope that had taken possession of his mind, their promise, followed by the sweet thought: “Perhaps their messenger awaits me, and the time is near at hand when my child will receive her sight, and with her own eyes behold the faces she loves, and the indescribable beauties of nature. He who performs such wonders as those men related must be above the gods.”

His first words to the porter at the bronze gates, as he rode through, were to ask if one had come with a message for him. The man informed him that no one except a grand lady from Rome had been there that day.

Nemesius felt a chill of disappointment, and passed on in silence towards the portico where Claudia waited, counting the hoof-beats of his horse on the grass-grown earth, and thinking that never had he come so slowly. Very tender and almost sad were his caresses and words when he reached her; he felt that she was defrauded by every hour’s delay, although she was all unconscious of the hope which had so exalted him by its promise of fulfilment.

By and by, when they were alone together, she related how happily the hours had sped that day; told him of the beautiful garlands they had woven for the household gods; and how Grillo had terrified her doves by making that dreadful sound which Fabian had pretended was meant for a laugh; but it did not frighten *her* as it did

the first time she heard it; she was only startled, then she laughed; for it seemed to do the beast so much good. And the shepherd had brought her a young lamb,—such a pretty, soft little thing, that had eaten out of her hand; and the golden pheasants had some downy young ones in their nests. And—oh! she forgot—the Lady Laodice had paid them a visit, and the Princess said she was very beautiful; “but—”

“What, my dear one?”

“Tell me”—she spoke almost in a whisper—“what death means?”

“Who has spoken to thee of death?” he asked, softly smoothing her hair.

“No one spoke to me of death, my father. I heard the Lady Laodice telling my cousin, the Princess, of a beautiful boy who was torn to death yesterday by a panther in the Amphitheatre, to amuse the Emperor. What is death?”

“Death is a riddle, little one, that none may solve, although it is the twin sister of life.”

“I do not understand.”

“Why shouldst thou care, my child? What hast thou, in the morning of thy life, and crowned with its roses, to do with death? Come, my dear one, let us go out and listen to the nightingales, who are pouring out all the treasured sweetness of the day to the stars. Listen! they are calling thee,” said Nemesius, leading her into the moonlit gardens, she well content to go whithersoever he would, and with sensi-



tive tact avoiding further question of that which he seemed unwilling to explain.

"I shall hear to-morrow," was the last thought that crossed the mind of Nemeseius that night before he fell asleep.

But the morrow came and went without a sign. "They fear that I will betray them, and so this hope, like the rest, will be defeated," was the conclusion of his dejected mind.

He did not reach home the following evening until late; meantime Fabian had come out to spend the afternoon, and say good-bye. He was "going up among the Umbrian hills to hunt for a few days," he said. It was not so much to hunt, however, as to try and rid himself, by exhilarating exercise in those wild solitudes, of his secret grief for Evaristus, whom he wished to enshrine in his memory like the statue of a god in a temple-niche—a form of sorrow more worthy of him than unavailing regrets.

His visit was well-timed, for the Princess Vivia intended to leave next morning. She would have been glad to prolong her visit, but had a presentiment that everything at the Alban villa was going to destruction, which nothing but her return could avert.

Fabian not only wished to see Nemeseius, to say farewell, but was anxious to recommend to his reading a certain correspondence between the Emperor Trajan and Pliny Secundus, when the latter was Governor of Bithynia, in relation to

the punishment of the Christians of that country, as offering a most favorable contrast to the violent measures of Valerian, and as an *addendum* to their recent conversation in the ilex grove. He devoted himself as usual to the entertainment of Claudia, and before he went away had the young peasant choristers brought together, led by Admetus, to serenade her. She called them "Fabian's birds," delighted their hearts by waving her scarf and clapping her hands at every pause, and finally threw a handful of small silver coins among them, which they scrambled for with fun and laughter, just as boys of the present time might do on a like occasion.

"Come back, soon, Fabian," said the sweet child, as he kissed her forehead. He promised gayly, said farewell to the Princess Vivia, and rode away in the white moonlight.

It was past midnight when Nemesius arrived at the great bronze gates of the Villa. No message. Oh, how time was passing! This was the fourth day; surely those men had had time to fulfil their promise if they meant to keep faith with him, and every hour's delay meant a day; for he knew that, should the war begin, at any moment he might be ordered to march away with his command to the actual scene of hostilities.

The next morning, when about half-way down the road, where it winds above the Tiber, the attention of Nemesius was attracted to a slender

youth, dark and beautiful, who stepped out from the shadow of the trees, and stood with a letter in his hand awaiting his approach. Halting, he glanced at the youth's face; then, taking the letter which he presented, proceeded to open and read it. It contained few words, but they were enough:

"He whom thou wouldst see will receive thee. The bearer of this will conduct thee to-night."

Nemesius raised his eyes and saw the messenger still waiting. "What is thy name?" he asked.

"Admetus," was the modest reply.

"Who art thou?"

"A Christian."

"I know thy voice—ah! I remember, the *choragus* of the choral welcome. Who sent thee, and for what?"

"One who knows. I am to be thy guide."

"Thou! At what hour?"

"When it grows dark. The moon rises late to-night. I will await thee here," said Admetus, with manner both gentle and reverent.

The courage of Nemesius was not of a sort to be restrained by suspicion, although his military training had taught him vigilance; he did not, therefore, waste time by further inquiry, but said simply, "I will remember," and rode on, undisturbed by doubts, and hopeful of results.

## CHAPTER XV.

NEMESIUS MEETS POPE STEPHEN—VALERIAN'S  
DIABOLICAL INGENUITY, AND HOW HE  
WAS BAFFLED.

AT the appointed hour, Nemeseius, clad in armor, his sword at his belt, and a dark toga thrown around him, passed out of the bronze gates, and, walking rapidly, soon reached the spot where he expected to meet Admetus and found him waiting his arrival.

"We have far to go," whispered the boy.

"Lead on," was the quiet answer.

So much mystery might naturally have awakened distrust, but, strange to say, Nemeseius felt none, his mind being occupied solely with the object he had in view. Together they walked down the steep road, through many turns and windings of the city, past guards, whose challenge the officer met by the countersign, until they were safely outside the walls, on the wide, shadowy Agro Romano, which looked vaster under the pale starlight.

Nemeseius and his guide had walked some distance in an apparently aimless way, when the latter turned to the left, disturbing several flocks of sheep that were slumbering in the grass

around the poor huts of their shepherds, and at last stopped before a small, dilapidated building so far gone to ruin as to be able to hold itself together only by the aid of numerous props. A bunch of grape-vines hung ostentatiously over the doorway, indicating that wine could be here obtained by thirsty travellers. Three quick raps on the door were answered by a woman, who opened it cautiously, and peered out. The boy Admetus whispered a single word; she threw open the door, and invited them to enter the poor place, which was dimly illuminated by the flickering rays of a lamp suspended by an iron chain from a rafter. There were one or two shelves, which held a few *amphoræ*, drinking-cups, and flagons; a rickety table, some rude seats, and a water-cask—all in keeping with the poverty-stricken exterior.

"Follow me," said the low, sweet voice of Admetus, as he led the way down a steep, dilapidated staircase into a cellar, that gave out an odor of rotten wood and mouldy straw.

Nemesius cast a quick glance around the vault, whose gloom was only intensified by the dull torch borne by his guide, and for the first time his instincts as a soldier suggested that it was just possible he was being led into a trap. But he did not hesitate; peril or no peril, he would risk everything to secure the object of his hope, and, following the light, he descended another steep, narrow stairway, cut in the rock of some

older foundation than that on which the tumble-down wine-shop had been built. At the bottom his guide turned into a narrow passage, then entered another that ran across the one they were in; and, after proceeding a short distance, stopped, and, pushing aside some rubbish, picked up a stone and rapped sharply against what appeared to be a solid wall of travertine. Suddenly an aperture opened, caused by the turning of a block of stone, which revolved on a pivot fixed into it at the top and bottom.

"Enter. I will await thee here," said Admetus.

Nemesius saw a long gallery stretching away into the darkness, and two soldiers with a light advancing towards him. They were unarmed, and gave him the military salute, saying "*Deo gratias.*" He entered; the stone door closed, then they courteously but briefly told him that they were sent to conduct him to the presence of the holy Bishop Stephen.

"Lead on," was all he said; but what were his thoughts as, following his unknown guides, he beheld stretching away in interminable lines, as far as the torch cast its light, tier above tier of square blocks of stone, carved in devices unknown to him, which sealed the graves of the Christian martyrs? None might know, nor could he define the strange awe that sat upon his soul as he moved through these ranks of the holy dead. He knew now that he was in the Cata-

combs; and, although his hand instinctively grasped the hilt of his sword, the faith and hope—devoid of superstition—which had brought him thither, to ask the intervention of a mysterious and divine power, unknown to him, to give sign to his blind child, did not permit him to falter a moment in his purpose, or ask a single question of his companions. His step was firm and steady, his splendid eyes clear and untroubled, his helmeted head erect, while the faint ring of his armor kept time as he moved.

After many sinuous turns along these silent corridors, filled with the *columbaria*, where, like “doves in the clefts of the rocks,” the martyred dead reposed, a sweet, solemn sound stole out on the silence, growing more distinct as they advanced; and presently, through an arch near which they were passing, a soft halo of light was shed, and Nemesius heard the words chaunted:

“O ye holy and just ones, rejoice in the Lord!

God hath chosen ye unto Himself for an inheritance.

Alleluia!

Precious in the sight of the Lord

Is the death of His saints. Alleluia!” \*

The sweet, restful strains died away; only a faint echo sounded along the dim galleries of the dead, like the whispered response of angels, as the martyr was laid to rest. Nemesius did not then know the significance of the light he had seen and the words he had heard.

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\* Vespers for Martyrs.

At length—it seemed as if miles had been traversed—the soldiers stopped before an opening, across which a leather curtain was suspended. One of them passed behind the screen, and, quickly returning, invited Nemesisius to enter. He did so, and found himself in a lamp-lighted apartment, its only occupant a man past middle-age, clothed in a white woollen robe, whose aspect was majestic but mild; whose countenance, shining with sweetness and compassion, was full of power; and whose eyes, penetrating yet kind, inspired him with emotions such as he had never before experienced in the presence of any human being.

He knew that this was the Christian Pope, Stephen, and involuntarily knelt before him; while the holy man, impressed by his appearance, and the spontaneity of his homage, laid his hand upon his head and gave him a benediction; then invited him to be seated near the chair from which he had risen to greet him; and, in tones that inspired confidence, asked the object of his visit, and expressed his readiness to serve him.

“I thank thee for granting me audience. I am here as a suppliant, but I will not deceive thee. Know, then, that I worship the Genius of Rome and the gods, and that I have taken part in the persecution of Christians,” said Nemesisius, with dignity, his voice subdued, yet firm, as he made his frank avowal, not knowing



but that it might bring defeat to his hopes; but, as an honorable gentleman and a brave soldier, he could not act otherwise.

"I have heard of thee," was the mild answer: "but know that it is a fundamental law of the Christian life to forgive our enemies, and do good to them who spitefully use us; otherwise we are not true disciples of Jesus Christ. Speak, then, for it must be no light cause that leads thee to seek me in the Catacombs."

"Thou shalt judge," answered Nemesius, refusing by a gesture the seat offered him. "It is for one most dear to me—my only child—for whom I solicit a share in those favors which I am credibly informed thou bestowest on the miserable and unfortunate."

"I but do the holy will of Him whose servant I am," was the gentle response.

Then Nemesius, in brief words, unveiled the story of his grief; the most eloquent language could not have increased the pathos of its facts; tears rose unbidden to his eyes, and fell unheeded; the very deeps of his strong heart were broken up, and he asked, as a boon more precious than any life could give, that sight might be given to his blind child. Nor—pagan as he was—did he spare lavish offers of treasures and countless gold to the Christian Pontiff; for had he not, from time to time, poured out his riches to the priests of his false gods for the same object? and he did not yet know the difference.

"The gifts of God cannot be bought with silver and gold; they are gratuitous, and of His divine mercy," quickly responded the Pontiff, whose heart was moved with Christlike pity towards the noble pagan. He saw in his simple faith a glorious possibility, and a swift, divine inspiration dictated the words: "With our God all things are possible; take comfort, therefore, for thy desire will be granted."

"Do I hear aright? Oh! sir—"

Nemesius was overwhelmed by this calm assurance that his long-delayed hope would be at last confirmed; he could scarcely believe, after all his bitter disappointments, that this was not some illusion of his over-wrought senses; his face paled, and for a few moments his thoughts were confused.

"On the morrow the blind eyes of the innocent one will be opened," continued the Pontiff. "Bring her to me in the morning early—not here, but to the old, walled villa west of the second milestone on the Via Latina."

"I would thank thee, could I find words adequate to express my gratitude; but language fails. I can only say that all I have—aye, my very life would I lay down, and still think the price too small for that which thou hast promised," said Nemesius, with profound emotion; then, with generous after-thought, quickly added: "but may I not bring my Claudia here? It may be unsafe for thee outside."

The holy Pontiff knew that the time had not yet come for his crowning, and replied: "There will be no danger. The villa belongs to an officer of the Prætorian Guard, whose wife is a lady of the imperial household; both of them are Christians, but not yet openly. Now we must part. May He whom I serve enlighten thee! Farewell!" And so saying he passed out beyond the leather curtain that covered the doorway.

The Pontiff had scarcely gone, when the two soldiers who had guided Nemesius hither came to conduct him back to the place where the youth Admetus awaited him.

While traversing these dim, silent streets of the dead, he was too deeply absorbed in thought to observe them as at first, when but one idea dominated his faculties; for now, radiating from that, many others occupied his mind. He thought of the old, walled villa out near the Via Latina, which had long been deserted as a permanent residence by its owners, who only came there occasionally in the summer, accompanied by numerous friends, to enjoy open-air festivities in the beautiful grounds. Nemesius knew it well, having visited there with Fabian; but he found it difficult to think of the brave, dashing Tertullus, and his gay, pretty wife Camilla, as Christians. Truly did it appear to him that the nets of the *Christus* were spread far and near, snaring in their meshes not only

the ignorant rabble, always ready to follow novelties, but those whom Rome could ill spare from her patrician ranks.

Nemesius wondered if Tertullus and his wife were at the villa, and whether they were alone, or surrounded as usual by visitors? Their being alone would ensure greater safety for the Christian Pontiff; in either case, his own way would be smoothed for the approaching interview, when, as if for the purpose of an early drive, accompanied by Claudia, he sought admittance at the old iron-ribbed gates; a sunrise visit to the near country-place of a friend in warm weather being too usual an occurrence to attract attention.

Not the least surprising incident of the night's experience, he thought, was the confidence reposed in him by the Pontiff, who had virtually placed his life in his hands, were he base enough to betray him; it appealed to Nemesius' best instincts, and, without the least admixture of that shallow gratitude derived from the expectation of favors to come, but moved solely by the magnanimous chivalry of a true, noble heart, he vowed that should any danger, from whatever quarter it might come, assail the holy man in their approaching interview, he would defend him with his very life.

How strange it was that he should, all at once, be mixed up in this secret way with individuals of that despised class which he, loyal to his own traditions and convictions, had persecuted, did

not for a moment disturb him; love for his child had led him, as it would have led him into the fires of Tartarus, could he have hoped to find there some potent elixir that would open her blind eyes,—love which, although he did not then understand it, was as a pillar of cloud to his feet, and a voice to his darkened conscience, that was like the far-off echo of a cry in the wilderness to make straight the path of Him who was drawing near.

Nemesius did not question the mysterious influences that were silently operating on his inner life: had he paused to do so, he would have ascribed them to the singular impressions he had received, and the profound joy he felt at the certain prospect that the long-hoped-for time—nay, almost the hour (for it was past midnight)—was at hand when the eyes of his beautiful one would be opened. It did not enter into his mind to doubt it—he a worshipper of the gods! And, what is more singular, he believed with simple faith that the wonder would be wrought by the power of the God of the Christians, and not by the exercise of Goetic and other occult sorceries, to which the heathen mind ascribed the miracles by which the divine power was manifested in those days.

Broad and white lay the radiant moonlight, broken by black grotesque shadows, over the Agro Romano, when Nemesius and his youthful guide emerged from the dilapidated wine-shop,

which concealed one of the many entrances to the Catacombs; soft winds from the sea, bearing sweetest odors from the numberless flowers over which they swept, filled the air with refreshment; here towered the mountains, draped in purple shadows; far away stretched the aqueducts; and there superb Rome, her marble splendors flooded with silver, as she sat like a queen upon her seven hills, with the opulence of the world she had conquered at her feet; while silence, like a sacred balm, brooded over all.

Nemesius did not pause to note the entrancing loveliness of the scene; the cool, sweet air, after the close atmosphere of the Catacombs, refreshed him; but his mind was too full of his approaching happiness to be diverted by exterior objects, however attractive. Followed by Admetus, and never halting in his progress, the ground seemed to fly from under his feet, and he reached the great bronze gates of the villa without having realized the distance he had traversed.

Here the Roman gentleman remembered his faithful guide, thanked him for his attendance, and told him that he wished to retain him in his service. There was no one to listen; the porter, who had taken one draught of wine too much, was in a profound sleep; and, not caring to rouse him, Nemesius entered by a narrow, private postern a little farther on, to which he alone had the key; but when he turned to bid his guide follow him, he had disappeared.

Hastening up the broad avenue, Nemesisius reached the house; but, before passing in, he stood looking up with yearning heart to the windows of the room where his blind darling reposed in peaceful slumbers, undreaming of the happiness so near at hand—but no! Could that white figure waiting there in the moonlight be hers? She detected the footsteps for which her ears had been on the alert, although he had walked lightly, fearing to disturb her; and her glad cry answered his thought. A minute later she was in his arms.

“I was waiting, my father, just for this, and began to think thou wouldst never come,” she murmured, in loving tones.

“But here I am, my little one! but only to kiss thee good-night, and bid thee go to thy couch and sleep; for we are to take an early drive together. And, O my child! something awaits thee, full of happiness for both thee and me,” he said, the glad news hovering on his lips; but he refrained, fearing that the excitement would keep her awake, and he wanted her to be all fresh and rested when they started on the morning’s quest; then he would tell her, on their way to the villa of Tertullus.

After the interchange of a few more fond words, she laid her golden head upon her pillow, satisfied to know that he had come, that he had kissed her good-night; while the thought of the promised early drive with him was so entirely

delightful that, like a pleasant song, it lulled her to sleep.

When in the silence of his own apartment, Nemesius stood at his casement gazing out at the far distance, and wishing for the dawn, the sunrise, the beautiful day, which the eyes now sealed in darkness would behold for the first time, until strange, wonderful thoughts, that awed his mind by their mystery, began to move the depths of his soul,—vast incomprehensible thoughts of the God of the Christians, before which all finite questions shrunk defeated, but he discerned “as in a glass darkly” something of the Truth notwithstanding, and felt the touch of a power so divine and resistless, that he cried out! “Thou art unknown to me, O great Deity, but if Thou give sight to my blind child then will I know Thou art God, and Thee only will I adore and serve.”

His vow was registered in Heaven. It was no longer a pillar of cloud, but one of fire, that was leading him out of the darkness; “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” was no longer an indistinct echo, and the way was being made straight for Him whose footsteps were already heard.

Nemesius dismissed the two drowsy servants whom he found nodding in the anteroom, and passed into his sleeping apartment. But his impatience for morning and all that it would bring banished even the thought of slumber, and he determined to keep vigil until it dawned.



How slowly the moments seemed to drag, as he stood at the casement straining his eyes towards the dark, distant mountains, to catch the first pale glimmer that would illumine their summits! But what human heart-longing ever quickened the march of Time? It was hard to wait, but how futile to stand idle when things were to be attended to which, if deferred later, would cause delay!

He remembered that no orders had been sent to the stables, and, stealing noiselessly out, he reached them in a few minutes, roused the sleepy and astonished guardian of the stalls, and, in those firm, quiet tones of command that always ensured obedience, directed him to have the low two-seated chariot in readiness and at the door by sunrise. Then, refreshing himself with a thermal bath, he went back to his apartment, lit a lamp, and began preparations to apparel himself as befitted the approaching momentous event. His child had never seen him, and he would appear well in her sight; he would don rich garments, and his superb armor of Damascus steel inlaid with arabesques of gold; his jewel-hilted sword, made with such cunning art that it was as keen and flexible as lightning; and wear across his breast the splendid silken scarf of his military grade. He scanned his dark, noble face in a mirror, holding the lamp so that its rays shone full upon his countenance, and wondered if at first sight its strangeness would repel her.

Never before, even in the days of his early love, had this man, self-poised and indifferent to externals, given so much thought to his appearance; for it was not alone the impression he would make on his little daughter, should she receive her sight—of which he had not the smallest doubt—that occupied his mind, but he wished to show due respect to that Power by which the wonder would be wrought, by appearing in all the insignia of his military rank, as before an Emperor.

His preparations at length completed, a more noble figure could scarcely be imagined; he looked the ideal of one of his own gods. He extinguished his lamp, and renewed his vigil at the casement, his gaze turned towards the mountains. 'At last! at last! a filmy, luminous whiteness faintly outlined their grim crests; the moon was bending low over the sea; tints of palest saffron veiled the morning-star, and the shadows began to be transfigured with flashes of gold and veins of crimson as they drifted away.

Nemesius went to the shrine that stood in a corner of the apartment, and, mixing wine and frankincense together in a gold cup, he offered the morning libation in honor of the gods. Having performed this act of heathen piety, he went out into the corridor, walked softly towards Claudia's apartments, and met Zilla, who had just left them, her countenance wearing an anxious and perplexed expression; which vanished in surprise

at his appearance. Folding her hands on her bosom, she bowed her head, and waited for him to speak. He asked if the child was still asleep.

"She is awake, and wishes to rise and be dressed for a drive which, she insists, she is to take with thee. She must have dreamed it, sir, as she was asleep before I sought my own couch last night."

"It was no dream; I saw her for a few moments after I came in; she was at the window listening for me. I promised the early drive. We start at sunrise, and shall pay a visit before we get back. Make her take a biscuit and a little wine before we go. And, Zilla! be ready with thy gladdest smiles to receive her when she returns; for, if I am not mistaken, she will bring thee cause for rejoicing," he answered, scarcely able to hold back his secret.

While Nemesus and his little daughter are speeding on their way towards the villa out on the Agro Romano, let us, anticipating their arrival, take a glimpse of the ancient structure. Its thick, extensive walls, which are twelve feet high—the bricks showing dark and mouldy where the plaster has dropped off, or where there are spaces clear of wild, clambering vines—would give it the aspect of a prison, were it not for the great trees waving above; and the roses that toss blushing, wanton sprays over them; and the odorous wall-flowers and vetches that grow out of the crevices of the crumbling mortar. Evi-

dently these ancient walls, with their deep-sunken iron-ribbed gates, were built for protection in lawless times.

The villa itself is a rambling structure, and originally had a tower at the north end, the upper portion of which had yielded to the tooth of Time, and tumbled in a mass of *débris* around it and upon its second floor, the stout timbers of which had withstood the shock, and still upheld the heap. Vines with pendulous scarlet flowers, ivy, wild vetches, and blue wistarias, are in possession, draping the ruin in colors and overlapping folds more gorgeous than the rich tapestries with which the Jews were compelled by the imperial edict to decorate the Arch of Titus on each anniversary of the destruction of their holy city. The grounds, interfered with by art only so far as to prevent their becoming a tangled wilderness; the grass, like violet-starred velvet; the old, mildewed statues looking out here and there from green, shadowy places, and the antique fountains, are all aglow in the golden splendor of the newly-risen sun.

Tertullus and his wife are not here; two or three old slaves move about lazily; and several peacocks, trailing their superb plumes over the grass, are the only signs of life apparent. Suddenly the sound of horses' feet, and wheels, is heard outside; the porter springs to his post, draws back the bolts: the great gates creak slowly open, and Nemesius drives through.

Slaves are ready to stand by the horses' heads as he draws up in front of the pillared entrance of the house; and he alights, his toga draped over his armor, and lifts Claudia out of the chariot.

"I will conduct thee," said a low, sweet voice at his side; and, turning, he sees Admetus, the *choragus* of the Aventine!—his guide of the cat-combs! Was the boy ubiquitous? He led the way into the vestibule, through the *atrium* into a wide corridor, which stretched through the villa, and ended in an apparently dead wall, panelled in wood that was black with age, where he stopped. One of the dark panels slid slowly upwards, and Nemesius, obeying the gesture of his guide, passed in, holding Claudia's hand in the firm, tender clasp of his own. He had told her on the way thither that she was to live no longer in darkness—that her eyes were to be opened in a little while—and her face was radiant. No more darkness and groping and dread, but light! light! Oh! how she would love the power, the hand that gave sight to her blind eyes! She could think of nothing else; her heart was in a tumult of joy.

A short walk through a narrow passage brought them to a door, which Admetus opened, and, having invited them to enter, left them, closing it after them. Looking around, Nemesius saw that he was in an oblong apartment, the windows of which were concealed on the outside by an interwoven mesh of vines. At one end, in the

centre, there stood, upon a dais elevated three or four steps above the floor, a large, curiously shaped chest, with two massive iron rings at each end. Three panels formed the front. On the central one, inlaid in gold, was the monogram I. H. S. ; on the one to the left was delineated a pelican feeding her young with the blood from her wounded breast; on that to the right, a fish. On the top of the chest stood a narrow, arched cabinet, about two feet high, its doors plated with gold; and a silver lamp, suspended from the ceiling by a fretwork chain of the same metal, burned with clear, steady light before it.

On the top of the cabinet stood a crucifix of such realistic art, that Nemesisius, as he gazed upon it, thought with a sudden thrill of what Fabian had told him of the death of the *Christus*, that day in the ilex grove. Frescoed on the wall above the crucifix was the saintly face of a woman, her eyes uplifted, her hands folded in an attitude of supplication, and there was a shadow of sadness and tears on the fair, virginal countenance. Could this mean the Virgin-Mother foretold by sibyls and prophets—the Virgin-Mother who brought forth Him hanging dead there upon the cross? Yes, the same—*Advocata nostra*, as she was known from the earliest days of Christianity.

There were some rude benches in the apartment, a cross-crowned chair, and about midway a sliding screen, which, when drawn together,

concealed the altar—for altar it was; a portable one, as the rings at each end signified; such as were in use in the early Christian churches, which were not edifices built separate and apart to themselves, but the private mansions of rich converts, consecrated to the worship of God, and permitted by some of the heathen tyrants to be so used when the fires of persecution were not abroad.

The Church of St. Clement,\* and that of St. Pudens, the friend of St. Peter and St. Paul, are still to be seen and venerated in Rome. And here in the villa of Tertullus was one of the few that had been left unmolested, because unsuspected and undiscovered; for who among the heathen, be his zeal ever so argus-eyed, would suspect such an abomination to exist in the dwelling of an officer of the Prætorian Guard? Even had such a suspicion arisen, Valerian Emperor would have thought twice before he ventured anything aggressive, knowing that the Prætorian Guard sometimes, with a word and a blow, made, and unmade, such as he. Still less was it dreamed that under the ruined, ivy-draped tower, there was an opening through one of the old wine-vaults into the Catacombs.

While Nemesius was observing the unfamiliar objects around him, a survey of which required far less time than it has taken to describe them,

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\*Under the foundation of the present Church of St. Clement.

a door opened, and the Christian Pontiff entered. He wore the same white woollen robe as on the night of their first interview, with the addition of a stole about his neck. Nemesius, who had thrown aside his toga, bared his head with reverent salutation, which was returned by a whispered "*Deo gratias!*" and the holy Sign of the Cross made by the Pontiff's uplifted hand towards him. The anxious father then led Claudia forward. The lovely child was arrayed in soft white garments; her long, golden hair fell in shining curls over her shoulders; her fair face wore the innocence and purity of an angel's; and as the saintly Pontiff gazed upon her, an expression of benign pity illuminated his countenance, and, laying his hand upon her head, he blessed her.

"What wouldst thou have, sweet child?" he asked.

"Oh! sir, I am blind, and would see," was the pathetic answer.

"I will give thee holy baptism, my child, and He who opens the eyes of the blind will enter thy heart, and teach thee to love and serve Him."

"I will love Him!" she said; then turning to Nemesius, who pressed her hand more closely, she continued: "Oh! my father, will we not both love Him who gives light to my eyes?"

"And to thy spirit," responded the Pontiff, who had among other supernatural gifts that of being able to discern spirits, and he saw by the



dispositions of the two before him, that they were already numbered with the conquests of Christ.

He went to the altar, and, after kneeling in profound homage for a moment, opened the gold-plated door of the Tabernacle, and from one of its interior compartments—there were two—drew forth a crystal flask. Nemesisius attentive to every movement, saw that it was filled with water; he knew not what baptism meant, but supposed it to be one of the conditions without which his child could not receive her sight; and he silently consented to the Christian rite, whatever it might signify, moved by something deeper than his natural desire for her blindness to be removed.

The little girl stood silent, waiting; the sacred rite began; she felt a strange sign made upon her forehead; and at the same moment beheld a beautiful One in shining raiment approach, whose presence was invisible to all except herself; and as the Pontiff poured the waters of regeneration upon her head, the Apparition touched her eyes,\* and—she was no longer blind! She looked up, around, in glad surprise, and uttered a cry of gladness; the darkness had disappeared, and there was light. It was a moment to be more easily imagined than described. She gazed into the saintly face of the Pontiff Stephen, into her father's, then flew to his embrace, crying: "At last I see thee!"

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The miracle opened the way—made straight

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\* It is so related.

the path nor grace to enter the mind of Nemesis, who received the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, nothing doubting; and, kneeling at the feet of the Pontiff, he asked for instruction in the Christian faith, and then for Baptism, which, it may be stated here, he received a few days after, in the same place.

The child saw the crucifix, and the sweet face of *Advocata nostra*; she knew them not, but both were indelibly impressed upon her mind, and were not strangers to her when, a little later, she heard the wonderful story of Redemption. Glints of sunshine through the ivy that mantled the windows filled her with innocent delight, and the thought of all the beautiful things she was to behold so transported her heart, that she ran and knelt at the feet of the Pontiff, exclaiming, with sweet simplicity:

"Oh! sir, wilt thou thank Him for me who has given me sight? But tell me His name, that I too may thank Him in my thoughts every moment of my life."

"I will, my sweet child. Jesus Christ is the name of Him who by His divine power removed thy blindness; keep His name in thy heart, and thank Him and love Him without ceasing. Thou art now His little neophyte; by and by thou wilt know Him, and the Father who sent Him. He has given thee a new name in Baptism, by which He will know thee among His little ones—the name of Lucilla,\* meaning light."

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\* "Little light."

The words of the holy Pontiff impressed themselves indelibly upon the little Claudia, especially the Holy Name of Jesus, which became at once a glowing spark in the very centre of her innocent heart. It seemed, too, altogether fitting that with the new life so wonderfully opened upon her she should have a new name, and that it should signify light—the light that had dispelled her darkness.

Claudia wondered what had become of the One in shining raiment who had touched her eyes when the baptismal water was poured on her head, at the moment she received her sight; but she did not ask; she could comprehend nothing yet, except that she had been blind all her life and could now see, and that her heart was glowing with love towards Him whose name was enshrined therein. Raising her eyes, sparkling with joy, she gazed on the Pontiff's saintly face, and said, with simple trust:

"Oh! sir, I would thank thee for opening my blind eyes if I knew how; but tell me who thou art, and thy name, that I may keep it in my heart with the Holy Name thou hast taught me."

"I am Stephen, a priest of the Living God, my child," he replied, laying his hand on her head; "and I now bless thee in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Go in peace; faith has been given thee: knowledge will presently follow, with the fulness of heavenly gifts."

Obeying a swift impulse, she knelt at his feet, kissed his hand, and laid her cheek for an instant upon it; he raised her gently, and she stood, happy to wait, near him.

"Thou wilt soon," he said to Nemesus, as he touched his gleaming corselet, "put on the armor of Christ for the overthrow of idolatry, and the establishment of His kingdom upon earth." The Pontiff spoke with emotion, for the winning of this noble soul to God filled him with unspeakable joy. "I would not delay thy Baptism. On the morrow, when the clepsydra shows the hour of noon, seek me here, and we will confer together before the rite. The wife of Tertullus will guide this little lamb into the green pastures of the one true Fold, of which Christ is the Shepherd. Now go in peace, giving thanks to the Almighty Father of all, for the grace of faith."

On their way home, the blue skies, the golden sunlight, the green, flowery stretches of the Campagna, over which cloud-shadows were skimming; the beautiful mountains, trees, flowers, butterflies, men and animals—all seen now for the first time—filled the child's mind with wonder and inexpressible delight.

"Oh! but for Him whose name is in my heart I had never seen all this or thee, my father!" she said, her voice tremulous with excess of happiness. "Oh! how I love Him!—but tell me, who is God?"

"He is the Creator of all things—the heavens, the earth, and all who live; and beside Him there is none other. He is the one, holy, Supreme Being, while the gods we have worshipped are false deities, who delude men to their destruction. Henceforth, my child, we will adore and love and serve the one Supreme God, by whose power thy blindness has been removed, and the darkness of my understanding enlightened," he answered with emotion, she listening, with her eyes fixed on the far-off sunlit spaces, believing, yet not comprehending what his words conveyed.

When they reached the villa and Nemesius drew rein in front of the portico, Zilla was waiting under the trees to receive her blind charge, to lead her in, watchful of every step, and to perform for her all those services of affection which her faithful heart was ever ready to bestow—to be eyes and hands for her at every turn, and anticipate every want. But when she saw her spring unaided from the chariot, and come running to meet her, the woman stopped as if spellbound; while the child, radiant with happiness, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks glowing, threw herself into her arms, exclaiming:

"Oh! Zilla—my good mother! I can see! I can see! Let me look into thy dear face."

"See? Have the gods at last opened thy eyes, my child?" said Zilla, who grew instantly white, and was almost unable to speak, the suddenness of the news was so overwhelming.

"The gods? No! Listen, my Zilla! There are no gods. Hast thou ever heard of Him called the *Christus*? He gave me my sight in an instant; my blindness is gone, and, oh! I can see! Is it not good news?" cried the child, her voice ringing with gladness.

But Zilla could not reply; she staggered from Claudia's embrace, and stood as if turned to stone, her countenance wearing an expression of pain and horror. All that she had longed and prayed for had come at last; the blind eyes of the only being she loved in the world had sight given them—but how? Rather had she remained blind all her days than to have her sight on such conditions! To be a Christian—that was what it all meant! And now—*now*—when it was death to deny the gods!

Zilla's first impulse was to go away, and be alone to look this terrible misfortune in the face; she tried to move, but her trembling limbs refused to bear her, and she would have fallen to the earth, had not one of the female slaves, who was passing at the moment on some domestic errand, sprang forward, and caught her in her strong arms. She was not unconscious, but dazed, prostrated, and bewildered, like one in a nightmare.

Frightened, Claudia ran in, through the *atrium*—she did not know where—in search of some one who would get her wine for Zilla; and, in a well-lighted corridor, she almost ran against

Symphronius; startled, she stopped and gazed steadily in his face. It was an old, wrinkled face, with a fringe of white hair and beard around it; his great black eyes protruded, his nose was so large that it gave a grotesque character to his countenance, and his complexion was like parchment. He stood a moment aghast.

"What has happened, and how is it that thou art running about all alone, my little lady?" he gasped.

"Now I know thee by thy voice," she said, not yet recovered from her astonishment at so strange-looking an apparition: "thou art Symphronius, the steward. I am no longer blind, and I was looking for thee to get some wine for Zilla, who is ill."

"Not blind? When—thou wert blind a few hours ago, my little lady!" he ejaculated.

"I was, but now I see," she sweetly answered.

The old steward felt as if the leathern pipe of one of the aqueducts had been suddenly turned down his back; for the news, although so joyful, gave him a shock that staggered him; and, not knowing what to say, he leaned against the wall, and made the Sign of the Cross.

The child had seen the Pontiff Stephen make that sign when he pronounced the Holy Names; he had made it on her forehead, and again when he blessed her; and she was conscious it was the sign of Him whom her heart knew and loved.

"It was He who made me see—the *Christus*,"

she said, sweetly. "Oh! it is good to find some one here who knows Him!"

"I am His unworthy servant," said the old man, with quavering voice; "but I cannot speak for joy; I can only lift up my heart, and give thanks to Him who has brought salvation to this house. Rest here, dear little lady, while I get wine for Zilla."

"I will come with thee," she said, taking his trembling hand as he turned to go to the wine-closet; "and presently, when Zilla is better, other good tidings await thee. Give me the wine; I will run back with it."

He gave her a flask of rich red wine and a crystal cup, then stood watching her in speechless emotion as she ran swiftly down the corridor. "Truly, truly," he at last whispered, bowing his head and crossing his hands reverently upon his breast, "the Lord God is a mighty God, and merciful in His ways."

When Claudia—as we will still call her—reached the *atrium*, she saw her father leading Zilla in, her face as white as a snowdrift, her eyes half closed, and her steps lagging and uncertain; he led her to a couch, and gave her the wine; she felt the child's soft lips upon her hands, her caressing arms about her neck, and heard the loving accents of her voice, which had always been as sweetest music to her ears. She opened her eyes and gazed for an instant into those so lately blind, now full of life and intelli-



gence, shadowed by a half-wondering look of distress; then the woman whispered: "Leave me a little while, dear child, until I am better."

"It is her voice—but can it be Zilla? I thought she would be glad—so glad when she heard I could see!" she mused, as, obedient to a look from her father, she left them, and wandered out under the trees, where, with wonder sweetened and brightened by faith, she gazed with delight on the beautiful things of nature.

The sweet child felt, without formulating it, how good it was that sight and knowledge should have come together, and how much less complete one would have been without the other. The thought of Zilla troubled her; it was all so different from what she had expected; it was the first drop of bitterness in her brimful cup of happiness, and disturbed her, until she whispered the Holy Name that was enshrined in her heart—the Name which so uttered is an appeal for help, which brings swift response, in strength to bear if not to heal. Her Christian life was only a few hours old; the mysteries of divine grace were yet unknown to her; but, although given in measure proportionate to her littleness, in their effects they were the same in kind as to one further advanced in supernatural knowledge.

When Zilla recovered somewhat, heathen-like, she was ashamed of her weakness, and by a strong effort of her will arose to leave the presence of Nemesius; but he detained her by re

questing her to resume her seat; he wished her to learn from his own lips the wonderful things that had taken place that day, and to understand that he and the child were no longer worshippers of the gods, but Christians.

The woman knew him too well to indulge the faintest hope of his faltering in the fatal course he had adopted, and his language was too lucid and coherent to afford a doubt of his sanity. She listened in silence, the iron entering deeper into her soul with every word he uttered, while the consequences of his apostasy gathered in frightful array before her. It was terrible; but Zilla was a woman whose maternal instincts had been fostered into unusual tenderness by the helplessness of the charge which, under peculiarly sad circumstances, had devolved upon her, and she presently found how indestructible her love was, and how it would at last triumph over herself. And, now that he had told her all, Nemesis added:

"It will be difficult, I fear, for thee to remain longer with us; for thou art still a worshipper of the *dæmons* known as gods; for thy own happiness, then, it may be better for thee to return to Thessalia, before the storm breaks. Thou shalt be provided with ample means and a safe guide—nay, do not decide too hastily. Later, I may not have power to serve thee, for we both know that to become a Christian means death."

"I care not for death, but for her, my child,

I would plunge this stiletto into my heart; and, happen what may, I will never leave her.”—She had snatched the gleaming, keen-edged thing from her hair, which fell in a dark, waving mass nearly to her feet.—“I know of no other way than the one I was born to—no other belief; but, gods or no gods, I will never be faithless to the promise I made to the dying,” she said, in hard, bitter tones.

“If such be thy choice, thy idolatrous belief must be kept in thine own heart, nor ever referred to in her hearing. It would be better to part, unless thou wilt open thy mind to receive the Truth—which is the highest good I can wish for thee,” replied Nemesius, in his firm, even voice.

“O Nemesius! thou who didst worship the gods, and with loyal mind didst punish their enemies with fire and sword! It seems too incredible for belief that thou shouldst all at once abandon the religion of thy virtuous and pious ancestors for a delusion!” she exclaimed.

“I have abandoned a delusion, by the grace of God, for the eternal Truth. My child’s blind eyes and the blind eyes of my spirit were opened at the same moment, by the grace and power of God; henceforth we are Christians!” answered the noble soldier.

“But, alas! hast thou considered her?” she wailed; “thy delicate, lovely one, on whom no rough wind of fate has ever blown, who has been

sheltered on my breast and in my arms from every ill my watchful care could avert! Ah, pity her! Is her tender flesh fit for the rack or the teeth of panthers? Ah, gods! what madness! And art thou ready to give up fortune, fame, life?"

"All—everything!" was his firm, low-voiced reply, as he turned away and walked out of the *atrium*, his nature stung in the tenderest spot, but his resolve and faith unshaken.

The woman felt as if the crowning woe of her life had come. She would as soon have expected the sky to fall, as for that to happen which had happened this day. With her head bowed down, her face covered with her hands, her hair fallen like a sombre veil around her, she sat there benumbed, without the power or wish to move, until soft arms stole around her, and the voice most dear to her said, in tones of tender entreaty:

"Wilt thou not raise up thy head, Zilla, and let me look into thy face? Hast thou forgotten that I can now see thee, and does it not make thee glad?"

Zilla's hands fell; she raised her wan face, and tried to smile into the bright, beautiful eyes that scrutinized her countenance, and beheld in its grief-stricken lines, its stern white aspect, a first glimpse of human sorrow; frightened, the child drew back, saying: "Speak, that I may know if thou art Zilla!"

Claudia's movement and her sweet words pierced Zilla's heart; her old passionate love for the child asserted itself, strengthened and intensified by a sense of the deadly perils which would henceforth lurk every instant about her; and roused with it an impulse, as fierce as that of a lioness when danger threatens her young, to save her from the evil consequences of the insane delusion under which, by the arts of the Christians, she and her father had fallen.

Fondly the old nurse looked into the questioning, saddened face; the rigor of her grief softened; tender, familiar words fell from her lips; and when she saw how brightly her darling's eyes beamed upon her, illuminating the child's lovely face with an inexpressible charm, an emotion of joy usurped the tumult of Zilla's grief, and, drawing the golden head to her bosom, she laid her cheek upon it in the old, caressing way, holding her close to her throbbing heart, as if to shield her from the vengeance of fate.

"Now, now do I know it is thou, my own good mother!" exclaimed the happy child, releasing herself, but still holding Zilla's hand. "Let us go to the gardens—to the old, beautiful places, which I have not yet seen, where I will tell thee of Him who has given me sight, and whose name is in my heart; for thou lovest me, and wilt also love Him for being so good to me; wilt thou not?"

Zilla yielded to the sweet constraint of her

hand, without speaking; for what could she answer to an appeal so confiding? But Claudia did not notice; her innocent heart was in such a divine glow with the new joy which had that day entered it, and her eyes were so ravished by the beauties of nature, over which it seemed to shed a light "not seen of men," that there was no place left for shadows or anxious thought.

As they crossed the beautiful, level spaces that lay between the villa and the gardens,—spaces checkered by a thousand flickering golden shadows,—Claudia caught sight of her father going in the direction of the stables, and, asking Zilla to wait a moment, she ran towards him; he saw her coming and stopped, watching her approach, his heart full of an indescribable emotion. Oh! how brightly shone the eyes but a few hours ago blind! What a depth of love beamed from them as they met his! He leaned down and kissed her head.

"O, my father!" she said, "hast thou seen Symphronius? No? Go, then, and make glad his heart by telling him all that is in thine; for he too knows and loves Him who opened my blind eyes."

"My old Symphronius too!" exclaimed Nemesius, while tears filled his eyes. "I will go at once;" and turning, he went back, while the child tripped away to her nurse, catching at the butterflies as they fluttered overhead, or pausing an instant to smell and touch with her dainty fingers some glowing flower beside her path, until

her hand was once more in the clasp of Zilla's, and their steps turned towards the cascade.

After his interview with the old steward, Nemesius rode out to his camp, where, after attending to military details, and reviewing certain evolutions in some newly adopted tactics, he returned to the villa, to find a messenger from the Emperor awaiting him, with a letter written in his own almost illegible hand, requesting his presence at the palace that evening—a request which, coming from him, meant a command.

Arriving at the palace, Nemesius found the rich and spacious apartments thronged with such of Rome's distinguished patricians as had not left the city for their summer homes on the Latician coast, or gone to their mountain villas; also military personages, orators, wits and scholars; for Valerian Emperor affected to be a patron of literature and learning. Among the guests were many beautiful women, whose sparkling eyes and rich garments gave brightness and variety to the scene.

On entering he was met by one of the Emperor's pages, who informed him that his imperial master had retired to his cabinet and awaited his presence. It had been some weeks since the handsome commander of the Imperial Legion had shown himself at the palace, and he found his progress impeded by many, who, imagining he was there of his own pleasure, thronged around him with friendly greeting and pleasant words.

Gravely courteous, a whispered word of his being on his way to the Emperor, released him from their well-intentioned importunities, and, anticipating no further interruptions, he passed on, looking neither to the right nor the left, until when near the draped entrance through which he was to pass into the ante-room of the imperial cabinet, he heard a sweet, low voice, meant for his ear only, saying: "Not a word or a look for a friend?" Turning quickly, he confronted Laodice, who, attired in soft, gold-colored Eastern silk, set off by draperies of scarlet Syrian gauze, spangled with gold, and jewels rare and sparkling, looked dazzlingly beautiful. As the glance of Nemesius rested for a moment on her, the color deepened in her cheeks, and her eyes shone under their long, black fringes with half-veiled splendor.

"My friends forgive my inattention as soon as they hear that the Emperor has sent for me, and that I am on my way to his presence," he replied, in gravely courteous tones; and the Roman gentleman would have passed on without further parley, but, advancing nearer to him, she said:

"Spare me just a moment! I would hear something of thy lovely child, and news of the dear Princess Vivia."

So near had she come that some of her fringes and gauze drapings had caught and got tangled about the hilt of his sword, which he, intent



only on the object for which he was there, did not at first perceive.

"Claudia is well, and happy to be at home among her flowers. Fabian is the correspondent of the Princess; but he is hunting somewhere in Umbria, so that I have really heard nothing from her since her departure," he answered, and would have gone on, but discovered his awkward dilemma, and made an effort to disentangle his sword, but, manlike, only tore the flimsy gauze, which seemed to elude his grasp, and made matters worse.

While thus busied, she full of apologies, his hand came in contact with her lithe cool fingers, which, under pretense of assisting to separate the mischievous tangle, contrived to make it more inextricable. She felt that he started, and drew back from her touch as if an asp had stung him, and said in her most dulcet tones: "Why 'always cold only to me, Nemesius?" He seemed not to hear her, but, making a step backward, slipped the scabbard from his sword, which remained dangling to her fringes and scarf; then, with a grave bow, he left her with the trophy she had so unfairly won, and a few minutes later entered the Emperor's cabinet, with a shadow of annoyance on his countenance, showing how intolerably the incident had made itself felt.

Valerian, always impatient and irascible, scowled and gave him cold greeting; but when

the delay was explained, the situation struck his sense of the ridiculous, and a low rumble of laughter, which threatened to end in apoplexy, told that he was appeased.

"By the gods!" he exclaimed, as soon as he recovered breath, "it was a cunning trick Cupid played thee, my grave commander; and, since he has caught thy sword in his net, it is to be supposed thy heart will be the next to surrender."

"My heart, great Emperor, had already made its choice and complete surrender before this awkward accident occurred," answered Nemesius, whose words had a significance of deeper import than his hearer dreamed of.

"By Apollo! that is news I am glad to hear; but it does not surprise me; for it is the cold, silent ones who are not only sly, my Nemesius, but like snow-mantled volcanoes, that burst into flame at unexpected moments, and just when people begin to think they are frozen," said Valerian, in his throaty, rumbling tones, evidently well pleased at his own wit; "but," he continued, "there are matters of more importance of which I desire to inform thee, knowing how zealous thou art for the glory and honor of Rome. Information comes that the army of the Persian monarch has fallen back from his frontier, and that he has dispatched an envoy hither with proposals which will not be known until he arrives. Sapor is a crafty fellow, and, although

I have no faith in him, I shall humor his mood to a certain extent, until some expected treasures come into my hands, wherewith I may be enabled to carry on the war with more destructive effect. Thou hast heard—nothing else has been talked of in Rome—about a Christian named Laurence, and his sorceries at the house of Hippolytus, and all that happened?”

Nemesius had, indeed, heard, but simply bowed in the affirmative, and held his peace by a mighty effort, but from no craven impulse, as may be imagined.

“Under dread of torture, this blasphemer of the gods has promised to reveal where the treasures of the Christians are concealed. They are reported to be immense. After I possess myself of them I will reward both him and Hippolytus—yes, by the infernal gods! such reward as will astonish them and delight Rome. Listen! I have been reading some of the Greek classics, and found not only new ideas, but certain novel methods; and I have also some splendid unbroken horses from the plains of Northern Asia, to illustrate an exciting episode. I have thought, too, of a new feast for the gods—a roast undreamed of in the culinary art, the fumes of which will be as incense sweeter than the nard of Assyria, and the cinnamon and spices of Arabia. We will propitiate the divinities with more Christian blood, until the earth smokes with it; then, all being ready, we’ll plant the Roman

eagles on the hills of Persia, and bring Sapor in chains to Rome to grace our triumph."

And so the tyrant boasted until his face grew purple, and his eyes glared with such diabolical fury that he failed to observe the countenance of Nemesius, which was bent upon him with a stern expression of prophetic warning, whilst his lips could scarcely keep back the words that would declare him a Christian. But the time had not yet come for this, and the Spirit of Love that had led him into the very vestibule of Truth restrained him for a more perfect and glorious testimony.

When at last he was permitted to leave the imperial presence, and had got outside the palace, he found a slave of Laodice—the Cypriot—in waiting with his sword, which he presented with profound obeisance, and with it a letter; then instantly and without a word, withdrew, gliding away somewhere in the darkness like a shadow.

That night before he slept, Nemesius, assisted by the old steward, removed and destroyed the shrine in his apartment, before which he had for many years offered idolatrous worship to the god whose image in gold stood thereon—the god in whose honor he had daily poured the morning libation of wine mixed with frankincense, and at eventide burnt costly Arabian gums and spices. The image, plate, small brazier, and cup, all of gold, and fine workmanship, he bat-

tered together into a shapeless mass, and directed Symphronius who from henceforth was the confidential agent of his charities—to sell the metal, and give the price to the poor. He commanded further that before the sunset of another day all the images of the *Lares and Penates*, and every vestige of idolatry, should be removed to the cellar, and there broken, and afterwards cast into a pit to be burnt for lime.

Then, commending his soul to God, and invoking the Holy Name of His divine Son, he retired to rest, after a day into which had been crowded an eternity.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## TARES AND WHEAT AND FINE GOLD.

NEMESIUS would have retired from the Emperor's presence at an earlier moment, but he had an object in remaining until the fury of the tyrant exhausted itself, which it presently did, in fitful curses and hoarse mutterings, like the last growls of a spent tempest; then, having refreshed himself with a copious draught of snow-cooled wine, and dried on a napkin of fine Egyptian linen his lurid visage, over which the sweat of his wrath still poured, he threw himself back against the gold-broidered cushions of his chair, and turned his bloodshot eyes on the grave, noble countenance of Nemesius, who stood leaning with easy grace upon the pedestal of a column, awaiting the opportunity he sought. It had come at last, and he spoke in his usual clear, even tones:

"I have a request to prefer, imperial sir," he said.

With a gesture Valerian signified his readiness to give attention, not having yet sufficiently recovered his breath to speak.

"As there is a prospect that active hostilities will be delayed by this new move of King Sa-

por," continued Nemesisius, "and as my legionaries are finely equipped, and under perfect discipline, I wish to transfer for a short time my command to the officer second in rank to myself, that I may look into my private affairs, and set them in order."

"A most reasonable request, and one to be expected after thy confession of an hour ago. It is but natural thou shouldst wish to spend a few days in dalliance with thy charmer before encountering the grim chances of war," answered Valerian, with rumbling voice and a coarse leer. "Thy requests are few, Nemesisius; and thou hast always done good service to the Empire, and not seldom risked thy head into the bargain by thy free speech to me—aye, and, by the gods! would have lost it too, but that thy audacious sincerity amused and refreshed me, and because I sometimes have need of one who does not fear to speak the truth, as thou alone hast the courage to do. Thou art no plotter, which cannot be said of many, and thy request is granted; but hold thyself in readiness for a sudden move at any hour, as I am convinced that the crafty Sapor is only couching for a deadlier spring. And—hold, Nemesisius!—thou hast free access to the prisons: the order has not been revoked; look into them now and then, to observe whether or no those contumacious Christians get the full measure of their deserts. Gods! how the wretches tire and sicken me!"

"I thank thee for the favor granted, imperial sir, and for thy kind words. I will not fail to visit the prisons," said Nemesius, as he bowed and turned to leave the cabinet.

"And take this kiss to the beautiful little blind maid at the villa," cried the Emperor, tossing a kiss towards him from his trembling, bloated fingers.

While the blood surged into his face at the bare suggestion, Nemesius, with an inclination of his head, left the cabinet, saying, mentally: "Yes; I will visit the prisons, but not in accordance with thy cruel design; and as to thy kiss, let it pass to thy *dæmons*, for whom only it is fit."

As he had left the palace, he met the Cypriot, as already related, who gave him his sword and a letter; thrusting the first into its scabbard, without noticing the fragment of spangled Syrian gauze that clung to the handle, and the latter under his sword-belt, he mounted his horse, put him to a gallop, and did not slacken his speed until he got beyond the crowded streets.

In thinking over his interview with Valerian by the light of faith which *now* illumined his soul, Nemesius felt as if he had been confronted with the very incarnation of the old, cruel idolatrous belief which he had that day abandoned, and now thought of with the greatest horror, while he experienced a more irresistibly urgent desire to fly from it, to be rid of every vestige of it, that, untrammelled, he might offer the entire



homage of his being and life to the One, Supreme God.

He was impatient for the morrow's noon, when, by the voluntary act of his own will, he would receive Holy Baptism at the hands of the Christian Pontiff, which would be the sign and seal of his high calling as a soldier of Christ. His great heart overflowed with gratitude, as he thought of the gratuitous and undeserved favors of which he had been the recipient—he who up to the time his child received her sight, had been the enemy of God and His servants, and was worthy only of eternal condemnation. Henceforth whatever he possessed, all that he was—his child, the most precious of all; his fortune, his time, his being, his life—he devoted with all the energy, sincerity, and generosity of his soul to the honor and glory of Him who had opened her blind eyes, and at the same time unsealed his benighted mind to a diviner light.

Nemesius was a man who never did things by halves; he had all his life held an uncompromising belief in a false and idolatrous religious system, and now, seeing his error, he would be as uncompromisingly and as sincerely a Christian.

These thoughts occupied his mind as he rode homeward through the balmy, star-lighted night, exalting his spirit, and filling him with a strange and wonderful peace; which explained to him, in a measure, the fortitude and constancy of the martyrs, whose sufferings he had sometimes witnessed.

Claudia was at her window watching for him. The first day in Paradise could not have been a greater surprise and joy to Eve, than this one had been to her whose eyes for the first time had feasted on the beauties of nature, and whose spirit, purified by the holy water of regeneration, beheld in them the creations of Him of whom she had never heard until this, the day of her new birth.

"O my father!" she said, after embracing him, "there has been so much to see! At last I watched the sun go down into the sea, and the sky was full of such beautiful lights, until the darkness came; then I was frightened, until I saw the stars like gold blossoms sprinkled over the sky: some of them bright and dancing, some shining far away, others glittering among the tree-tops. O my own father! is not He who made them, good to give lamps to the night, that there may be no darkness?"

"He is indeed good, my sweet one — this Creator and Supreme God, and worthy of all love and homage," said Nemesius, tenderly. "Now seek thy couch, my child, and ask His protection before sleeping."

He kissed her, looked once more into her bright, beaming eyes with a glad uplifting of his heart, then left her with Zilla, and went down the corridor to his own apartments. Throwing his helmet and sword upon a table, his eye was attracted by something white, which had fallen

to the floor when he unbuckled his sword-belt. He saw, by the rays of the lamp overhead, that it was the letter he had so mysteriously received, and which he had forgotten until this moment. Mechanically he took it up, broke the seal that held the silk cords together, slipped them off and opened it. Glancing over the first lines, a slight start of astonishment, his knitted brows, and the dark flush that mantled his face, indicated something unusual and displeasing.

As it was, indeed; for Laodice, almost hopeless of winning his love, had fallen on this desperate expedient—one that she had sometimes thought of, but which was precipitated by her accidentally meeting him that night. As soon as he had passed on to the Emperor's cabinet, she fled to her own apartments, and, led by her passionate, audacious nature, which mastered her womanly pride and her very reason, she wrote to him the letter he has just read, laying herself and her love at his feet. How many things were now understood which at the time of their occurrence had caused him only a momentary surprise! Again a dark flush mantled his noble face. "Unhappy woman!" he said, speaking low; "thy confidence shall never be betrayed, but there is only one course open to me."

Opening his cabinet, he selected a fine piece of vellum, and wrote:

"The enclosed is returned, to be thrown into the flames by the same hand that penned it, and forgotten. A heart already bestowed, and engrossed by a supreme love, has nothing left to offer except good wishes."

This he folded with the letter in a wrapper of papyrus, secured it in the usual way with silk cord and his seal, directed it, and, with it in his hand, went to ascertain if Symphronius was still up. The old steward had not gone to bed; he had just risen from his devotions when his master entered. No need had he to grasp and conceal the crucifix before which he had been praying, when he heard footsteps approach his door, or dash away the tears which his contemplation of the sufferings of Christ had caused to flow over his wrinkled face; for his master was, like himself, a Christian; and in those days the new birth made childlike the old as well as the young, and they loved the Christ with simple minds, their only aim being to show their devotion to Him, even to the shedding of their blood, in return for all He had done and suffered for them.

"I am glad to find thee awake," said Neme-sius, gently; "for I should have been sorry to disturb thy slumbers. I have an important letter, which I wish to be delivered early to-morrow by a trusty messenger, and thought I might find Admetus here."

"He will be here about midnight. He has been sent to bear the Holy Bread to some who

are to suffer at the Temple of Mars to-morrow, among them a priest," answered Symphronius. "One of the prison guards, a Christian, knows the boy; and, besides, the friends of the condemned are allowed to visit them the day before their fiery trial."

Nemesius knew this to be a fact; he had more than once witnessed these last interviews, and observed that the victims wore serene countenances, irradiated by flashes of divine anticipation; while their friends lamented and wept bitterly, reproaching them for preferring a cruel death to life and safety, which a grain of incense offered to the gods would purchase. But he knew nothing yet of the Holy Bread, which, in times of persecution like the present, the exigencies of the Church allowed to be conveyed to the victims, by approved messengers, to strengthen and refresh them in the conflicts through which they were condemned to pass to their exceeding great triumph and reward; but he would soon know in all its fulness and divine significance that it was the bread of eternal life, the Most Holy Eucharist, the real body and blood of Jesus Christ.

"When he comes give him the letter, and charge him to deliver it only into the hands of the person to whom it is directed, at the imperial palace, and allow no other eye than his own to see the superscription," said Nemesius, grasping the hand of his faithful old servant. "And

to-morrow I have much to say to thee, and many matters to arrange; but now good-night."

At last, in the solitude of his own apartment, the happy convert was alone with his thoughts. The moon hung gibbous and pale over the distant sea, and a cool, damp wind drifted up from the Tiber, whispering its moan to the shivering leaves. To this noble Roman soldier it had been a wonderful day, from beginning to end, typical of God's world, in which His marvels, by some secret design of His providence, are woven in with human antagonisms, and stand face to face with evil. After the joy of the morning, how repulsive to his nature and his newly-awakened soul all that the evening had brought. But it was already past, borne away as by a torrent, leaving unobscured the grace of faith which had risen out of the darkness upon him.

He sat there in the shadow, thinking. He knew nothing yet of Christian dogmas, but his entire faith in the existence, supremacy, and eternity of God, in His power and divine attributes, opened the way to their reception and glad acceptance without discussion; for there would be nothing to doubt in whatever proceeded from Him, the everlasting Truth. On the morrow he would receive holy baptism, the sign and seal of his covenant with Christ, by which, the Pontiff Stephen had instructed him, he would be made a child of God, and admitted to full participation in the divine mysteries He had

provided for His faithful ones. And so he rested content on the rock of Faith, until knowledge should come.

Nemesius had heard the old story oft repeated that the Christians at the celebration of their secret rites worshipped an ass's head—the old rabbinical legend, which had drifted to Rome centuries before, and had been forgotten and revived over and over again as an invective and reproach to the Jews, and later to the Christians, between whom at first, and even when they might have known better, the ignorant minds of the Roman soldiers could not distinguish. The legend ran that a certain high-priest of the synagogue was in the habit of remaining so long in the Holy of Holies when it was his turn to officiate, that one day, having prolonged his stay to even a greater length than usual, a Levite was sent to see if perhaps he was dead, and on opening the curtain beheld him alive, and worshipping a spirit in the form of an ass.\*

There had never been lack of intercourse between Rome and Judea, international comities and alliances for aid and defence, especially when the latter was beset and sorely pressed by Syria, Egypt, and Assyria in turn, and assisted by Rome, until such time as she was ready to "lay waste" the land, and number it among her own

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\* Spoken of by Jerome in the 4th century, also by Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis. It was current among the Gnostics.

insatiate conquests. Pompey's soldiers brought the legend afresh to Rome with their Hebrew captives, to fling it at them with blows and derision; again the soldiers of Titus used it as a gibe to give emphasis to their insults and cruelties towards the unfortunate people, whose holy city they had razed to the ground. And so, through ignorance of the distinction which separated Jew and Christian, it got fastened on the latter, because they celebrated the sacred functions in secret.

And it was not an unusual occurrence that some who had embraced Christianity, but had not yet been advanced to a participation in or even to be present at the holy mysteries of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, when arrested and confronted with the rack, or the lions, or the flames, through mortal terror not only denied Christ, but cursed Him, and corroborated the foolish accusation about the worship of an ass's head. Nor did they deny that the Christians, as was currently reported and believed, sacrificed a young child every day to their Divinity, and afterwards devoured it. Conjecture can only suggest the origin of the last malignant report. It was known through spies and apostates that the Christian priests offered to their Deity a pure, spotless sacrifice of flesh and blood, of which they afterwards partook.

Ignorant of the Divine Eucharist, what could so well answer that which they imagined as a



young, sinless child? They knew that the most precious sacrifice that could be offered to Moloch was a young child, and that mothers themselves, to propitiate him by sacrificing what they most valued, placed their offspring in his great, brazen hands, which, heated by fires within the statue, scorched their tender flesh, while wild, barbarous music and shouts rent the air to drown their shrieks, until the little victims dropped into a fiery abyss below. Of course then it was a young child that was daily sacrificed to the Christus, and Roman mothers held their babes close lest they should be stolen for this purpose; while to threaten a refractory little one with, "I'll give thee to the Christians!" was sufficient to reduce it to swift obedience and quiet.

Nemesius had heard these rumors, and there were times when, if they had interested him in the least, he might have believed them; but now, having the grace of faith, the golden portal of all others, neither fables nor malignant rumors had power to disturb his mind.

There was no need for Nemesius to count the cost of becoming a Christian, for he was familiar with the methods of the persecution, and knew exactly what it was; but the arrangement of his affairs and the disposal of his wealth required consideration. Whatever the details of his plans might be, he was resolved that, in case he and his child were called upon to suffer martyrdom, the persecuted Church should inherit his

wealth for the benefit of her needy and suffering members; and even were they left unscathed—which he had no reason to expect—he would devote the greater part of his substance to the same objects, as a thank-offering to God for the miraculous and inestimable favors they had received at His hands.

On the following morning Nemesius had an early interview with his old steward, to whom he confided some of the preliminaries relating to certain plans which he purposed to intrust to his supervision, among them the liberation of his slaves, whose number he did not know. But Symphronius had been the factor of the rich estate on the Aventine too many decades to be ignorant of that, or any other business detail connected with it; his service had been too vigilant and honest, his accounts too thoroughly well kept, for him to feel disturbed now at the prospect of his present task by a wearisome sense of anticipated toil, or a dread of uncertain results. His systematic methods of the past simplified the undertaking, while the motive sweetened and lightened it.

Zealous to begin the work confided to him, the old man went back to his office, to take from the secret corners of his cabinet accounts and records which he had not expected would ever see the light again until he had passed to the shades. He knew that every one of them would bear the most captious scrutiny; but now, since every-

thing had to be divided and parcelled off, and the slaves liberated, it was quite a different matter, in spirit and in fact, from all that had gone before; for in this the old leaven of idolatry had no part, the honor and glory of the only true God being the incentive.

Nemesius sought Claudia in the apartment where the light morning repast was usually taken. She had just come in from the beautiful gardens, and was waiting for him. She was arrayed in a white, silver-embroidered robe and tunic; her eyes sparkled as if, like the fountain's spray, they had drank the sunlight; her cheeks, delicately tinted, were dimpled with smiles; her hair, thrown back from her round, childish forehead, flowed in light, golden waves over her shoulders; and Nemesius thought, as she flew to his embrace, that so the angels of God must look; for with her human loveliness there was that nameless light irradiating her countenance, which like the "beauty of the King's daughter," was from within.

"Lucilla, my own!" he said, tenderly, as he gazed into the bright eyes uplifted to his.

"The light is beautiful, my father; it fills me, and, oh! it makes my heart so glad, that I stretch out my arms so"—showing him—"to fly like the doves!"

"Thou hast not wings yet, dearest," he answered, laying his hand caressingly on her golden head—"not yet. But come: I must eat

something and be off; for I have much to attend to to-day."

Instead of offering the customary libation, Nemesius made the blessed Sign of the Cross, which Claudia did also, while she breathed the Holy Name that glowed in her heart; then as the minutes flew she told him with childlike rapture of all she had seen that morning—the sunrise, the fountains glittering in its beams; her doves, and her wonder to see them spread their snowy wings and sail away in the air; the flowers, and last of all Grillo, whose appearance filled her with surprise and merriment; his long ears, his long, solemn face, his bright eyes and small hoofs, altogether forming an image strangely unlike the one her imagination had pictured of him. He knew her by her voice, and she knew him by his; for in his delight at seeing her he had lifted it up aloud, holding her in half-frightened suspense until his vociferous welcome subsided.

There was not a shadow to dim the ecstatic happiness that had so unexpectedly come into her life; by Zilla's tender, vigilant care, nothing of pain or sorrow had ever been permitted to reach her ears; consequently she had not as yet heard anything of the persecution and its horrors, and a sudden pang smote her father's heart as the thought of what might await her in the near future now passed vividly through his mind. Would she not die in wild affright if

confronted with the ghastly horrors of a cruel death? Would not her child-heart fail at the very last before the appalling paraphernalia of torture?

He had too often faced carnage and death on the battle-field, to dread it in any shape for himself; to have lost his life under the proud advancing eagles of Rome would have been fame, but to lose it now for Christ, who had suffered all things for his salvation, would not only sweeten the ignominy, the insults and tortures of martyrdom, but win for himself a fadeless glory, and crowning beyond all that earth could give. But for her—ah! he could not yet endure the contemplation of it; he put it away from him, arose from the table, and, after embracing her with great tenderness, hastened out to mount his horse, go to his camp, and transfer his command in due form. He was beginning to learn how possible it is for human nature to be crucified without the cross and the nails.

When half way down the avenue, Nemesis saw a chariot, attended by slaves, pass the bronze gates. As it approached nearer, he observed that it was occupied by a lady of distinguished appearance, whom he almost instantly recognized as Camilla, the wife of Tertullus, and he drew rein. Her fine, spirited face lighted up with pleasure, and after the usual salutations were exchanged she said, in a low tone:

“I have come to make the acquaintance of thy little daughter, and wish thee joy.”

"I will turn back and introduce her to thee, for she is shy of strangers. Thy thought of her is most kind," he replied, remembering that the Pontiff had promised that this lady would instruct Claudia in the rudiments of Christian doctrine.

Camilla was not critically beautiful, but the intelligence, brightness, and frank expression of her face, imparted to it a winning charm which was irresistible. She had been the gayest woman in Rome, full of audacious courage to overstep conventional customs, if they interfered with her pleasures; witty, outspoken, and carrying off everything she did with such cheerful grace that, instead of blame, she won admiration, and had, notwithstanding her escapades, a reputation that was without a flaw. By her sayings or doings, she kept her large circle of friends well provided with amusement; while her entertainments, quite out of the beaten track of such things, were made delightful more by their novelty than their splendor and profusion. But suddenly, so her friends said, she had taken a caprice, and adopted a more quiet mode of life; she excused herself by declaring, in a laughing way, that she was only learning how to grow old with a good grace, and how at last to assume the dignity of a Roman matron, which she had been accused of lacking.

But the fact was—*sub rosa*—that Camilla's husband, Tertullus, whom she idolized, had be-

come a Christian, through having heard the testimony and witnessed the martyrdom of a friend he loved, and she, by the grace of God, followed his example. Since then many daring things had been done in Rome for the persecuted Christians—many an edict had been brushed over with lime or pitch; many a martyr's body, destined for the cloacæ, mysteriously disappeared; but neither the instigators nor perpetrators of these outrages could be traced. But had she chosen to speak, Camilla could have given the key to it all; for her own daring spirit was now exercised otherwise than for the amusement of her friends, and it was she who incited many of these exploits.

She and her husband had many a laugh together in secret when she recounted her hairbreadth escapes; how, by ingenious devices, she had set magistrates and prison officials by the ears, thereby delaying, by a confusion of orders, the torture and execution of those who at a given time were sentenced to die for their steadfast faith in Christ; and how, once on a dark, stormy night, she had caused to be suspended from the neck of one of the marble deities, a rude portrait of Valerian Imperator, head downward. She had alert hands and willing, agile feet to do her bidding, and gold in plenty to bribe sordid jailers and executioners for certain purposes, not unlike that which inspired Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to go secretly, after the Crucifixion,

with fine linen and spices, to give sacred sepulture to the dead Christ. It was she who planned everything, and sometimes, moved by her adventurous spirit, took an individual and personal share in the attendant perils.

This was, however, but one side of Camilla's present life; the reverse showed a sweet, womanly tenderness in her ministrations to the suffering and afflicted, an unsparing hand in relieving their necessities; she had words of strong fervor and consolation for the weak and faint-hearted, and courage herself to die, whenever called, for the love of Him whom she so zealously loved and served.

By this time the villa is reached, and, assisted by Nemesius, Camilla alights from her chariot. Claudia is straying among the flowers, and listening to the carols of her old friends, the finches and thrushes, hidden among the leafy coverts overhead. She hears her father call her, drops the violets and roses she has gathered, and, emerging from a tangled screen of white jasmine and eglantine which had concealed her, she runs with swift, graceful steps towards him. Taking her hand, he introduces her to the strange lady, who had watched her approach with moistened eyes and a sweet, friendly smile. After one quick, penetrating glance into her face, which the child seems to read instantaneously, she lays her hand in the lady's soft clasp, and in few simple words gives her welcome.



Then Nemeseius, well satisfied, left them together; he had not a moment to spare; he must be at his camp by a certain time; his business there would consume at least an hour, and at noon he was due at the old walled villa out near the Via Latina.

Camilla attracted and won Claudia, and after Nemeseius had mounted and ridden away, she proposed that they should go and find a seat in some shaded, sequestered spot in the gardens, saying, with a bright smile:

"I have things to tell thee, my child, meant only for thine own ear. The birds and the fountains babble only of their own affairs. I want to talk to thee of yesterday, and thy visit to my villa beyond Rome. Ah! now thou knowest! Come."

"Dost thou know Him who opened my blind eyes—the Christus?" asked the child, her countenance radiant with sweet eagerness.

"Aye, and in truth do I, my little one; and it is to speak to thee of Him that the holy Bishop Stephen has sent me here to-day," answered Camilla, as hand in hand, they wandered through the fragrant, shaded alleys to the Grotto of Silenus, where they found comfortable seats on the moss-grown mounds that surrounded it.

While the fountain tossed its spray towards the sun, with a sound like far-off silver bells,—while the birds sang, and the blue Roman sky looked down from its viewless depths over the

indescribable beauty of the scene, Camilla, in simple, touching language, related to the child the wonderful story of God's infinite love and mercy, which had moved Him to give His only Son to die for the redemption of His creatures, whose sins made them worthy only of condemnation; and how His Virgin Mother—*Advocata nostra*—had suffered willingly with her divine Son, holding nothing back, crucifying nature, and accepting her desolation and sorrow, so that nothing should be wanting to complete the sacrifice. Tears filled Camilla's eyes; her strong face grew soft and tender as she spoke to the little neophyte, who listened with rapt attention, as if fearing to lose a single word.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands, "if I had been there I would have asked the cruel ones to take my life, and spare His. How could the Holy Mother bear such grief? Was it for the love of us she stood by His Cross, silent and weeping?"

"It was all for us, dear child, that both suffered—through love whose depths can never be sounded, whose heights the human mind can never reach; He in His sacred flesh, she in her sacred, maternal heart," said Camilla, who in her fervor almost forgot that she was speaking to a child.

"I cannot understand it all yet, but I can love! I can love! His name, *Jesus* Christus, is in my heart, and I will ask Him to let me too be the

child of His Holy Virgin Mother, to live at her feet and learn. He opened my blind eyes but yesterday, and then I knew Him—not until then; and now my father and old Symphronius and I no longer worship the gods, but Him only,” said Claudia, her face aglow with earnest desire.

“Love like thine, dear child, is most precious to Him—more precious than knowledge; for it was love that stood by Him at the Cross when all had abandoned Him—love that had no thought of self, and was exalted to the highest courage. Thy love, my child, is precious in His sight, and His grace will be sufficient unto thee. I heard with great joy what had happened at my villa yesterday; and my husband, who is a brave officer of the Prætorian Guard, and a Christian, could scarcely contain his delight when the holy Bishop, after the divine function, at which we were both present, told us the glad tidings; for thy father is a noble conquest, over whom the persecuted Church rejoices. I am coming to see thee often, dear one, to teach thee the rudiments of the Christian faith, and lead thee to a knowledge of its divine sacraments, which will unfold new joys, new mysteries of love, that will bring thee in nearer communion with the dear Jesus Christ every hour, every day.”

“O lady! how much I thank thee!” exclaimed Claudia, kissing Camilla’s hand, which held hers; “I think He will help me to understand, for I am only a child.”

"He will help thee, little one, never fear," answered Camilla, with one of her radiant smiles, as her eyes rested lovingly on the angelic face uplifted to hers. "Dost thou know the Sign of the Cross, and how to bless thyself in the Name of the Most Holy Trinity?"

"I know the sign, but not the words," was the simple answer.

Camilla taught her, the little girl repeating the holy names after her distinctly and reverently.

"Do this often, sweet child; it is the Christian's ægis in all dangers. Now I must be gone, but here is something I have brought thee to wear next to thy heart—a little picture of *Advocata nostra*," said Camilla, giving Claudia a crystal medallion, on the inside of which was painted the lovely face of the Virgin Mother.\*

"And this is *my* treasure," continued the noble lady, drawing a gem from her bosom, on which was cut in *intaglio* a head of Christ, copied from a famous one of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar; † the face that of a "man of sorrows and afflicted with grief," who had "never been

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\* Crystal medallions of this description, which open like locketts of the present day, have occasionally been found, with the bodies of the martyrs in the Catacombs; some with sacred images painted within, others plain. It is supposed that in times of persecution the Christians, in view of the perils to which they were constantly exposed, were permitted to bear the Sacred Host about their person in these crystal receptacles, to be used as their Viaticum in extremity.

† See appendix.

seen to smile, but often to weep,"—a face on which the griefs of the world were stamped. The child's eyes grew sad as she gazed upon it; her heart was so full, she whispered, scarcely breathing, His Name; "O Jesu Christel" then pressing the sacred image to her lips, she gave it back to Camilla.

"And this," she said presently, as they were returning to the villa, while she held the crystal medallion close to her heart, "I will keep right here, that the thought of her and of her Divine Son may dwell there together. Thou hast been very good to me, dear lady, and I wish I knew how to thank thee; but perhaps the next time thou art so kind as to come, and after I have thought it all over, I shall have found the words I want."

"Love me, sweet one," said the Roman lady, with a bright smile; "I wish no other thanks. Now we must part, but not for long, and may the dear Christus keep thee! Farewell!" Then she bent down, and, kissing her, stepped into her chariot; the spirited animals dashed off, and a few moments later passed out of sight.

Giving one more look at the tender, gracious face on her medallion, Claudia went in to find Zilla—pale, sad Zilla. She wanted a chain for the crystal ornament; she would not rest until it was suspended on her neck, and lying against her heart.

Never so happy as when serving her, especi-

ally now that she was no longer blind and dependent on her at every turn, Zilla looked over the ornaments and trinkets of her dead mistress, which had been confided to her care, and found one formed of light links of gold curiously wrought, upon which the medallion was slipped, the clasp of the chain fastened, and, without question on her part as to what it was or whence it came, she passed it over the child's shining head, lifting the bright, silken curls to give it place; saw her press the pictured image to her lips, and drop it under the folds of her tunic into her bosom. Then, full of the old child-love, throwing her arms around Zilla, she kissed her.

"Some Christian sorcery, doubtless," bitterly thought the poor, faithful heart; "and perhaps more deadly than the amulet that Laodice gave her. O bona Dea! hast thou no power to save this child from destruction?" But she returned the little one's caress, and began to talk with her as if nothing had happened.

Nemesius, having reached his camp in good time, arranged the temporary transfer of his command to the officer second in rank, and reached the villa of Tertullus some minutes in advance of the hour which had been named by the Pontiff Stephen. The holy man received him with paternal kindness, bestowing his blessing, which he knelt to receive, after which the Pontiff proceeded to instruct him on the necessity and importance of Baptism as a condition to

salvation. To the receptive and upright mind of Nemesisius no difficulties presented themselves; for, already enlightened by divine grace, he questioned nothing, knowing that God was the Eternal Truth, and that, through His Son, He had revealed to His Church all things necessary to salvation.

When the subject was explained and made clear to his understanding, and the Pontiff told him that he was then ready to administer the sacred rite, Nemesisius hesitated, and said:

"There is a question I would ask; one not implying doubt, but ignorance, on which I would be enlightened."

"Thou wilt not ask amiss, for the Church is a divine guide. What wouldst thou know?" was the gentle response.

"This. God being supreme, omniscient, and infinite in all His attributes, could He not have saved man, whom He created, without sending His Divine Son to suffer the torments, ignominy, and cruel death He endured for man's salvation?"

"That is a question which naturally presents itself to some minds on the threshold of Faith, but a few words will throw light upon it," answered the saintly Stephen. "Man, as thou hast learned, was created by God in order to fill the place of the angels who had fallen. But when man fell into sin, it became needful for God to punish him, or God would have manifested an indifference to sin, and would have

ceased to be a righteous moral governor. It behooved that man's sin should be punished, but had the punishment been inflicted on man, it must have been unending, and man would never have fulfilled the object and end of his creation. Thus would God's honor have suffered.

"How was the sin of man to be punished as God's honor required, and man likewise restored to God's favor, and the place of the angels supplied, as God's honor also demanded? No created being could make the atonement, for no created being could offer to God anything beyond which he was already bound as a creature to offer. It remained, then, that the task must be undertaken by the God-Man, who alone could so atone for sin that man should be restored to favor. God did not inflict the punishment of sin on Christ, who voluntarily offered Himself as the Victim and Propitiation, and assumed human flesh in the womb of the undefiled Virgin Mary, and became the Redeemer of man, who through His sufferings and death alone could be restored to the favor of the Eternal Father."\*

The countenance of Nemesius, which had been somewhat overshadowed at first by the gravity of his thoughts, grew clearer as the Pontiff, speaking impressively and distinctly, unfolded each link of his argument, which was not only

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\* Dialogue "*Cur Deus Homo.*" What St. Anselm here expresses had always, from its foundation, been the belief of the Church.



grand and simple, but so divinely logical, that he threw himself at his feet, exclaiming: "Make me a Christian by the holy rite of Baptism, I beseech thee, sir, that I may not be another moment separated from Him who made a sacrifice so great and perfect for me. Henceforth I am His even unto death!"

The Pontiff granted the prayer of Nemesus, and without delay administered the holy rite, whose regenerating waters are of that "River of Life" that St. John saw proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb. From that mystical moment the Holy Ghost entered into the cleansed tabernacle of the man's soul, kindling therein the fire of charity, which consumed the dross of his nature, and by a miracle of grace made him indeed a new creature in Jesus Christ.

As the days passed by, the neophyte, being in frequent intercourse with the Pontiff, quickly learned the needs of the persecuted Church, and how to relieve her suffering members, and console where he could not save. Self was forgotten; daily among the dwellers in the Catacombs, visiting in secret the poor abodes of the miserable in the byways and corners of the proud city of the Cæsars, and out in the dilapidated huts on the beautiful Agro Romano, he distributed his substance to the hungry, the naked, the sick, and did not fail to visit the prisons, as directed by the Emperor, but in a far different spirit from the command.

As his name was still a power, Nemesius had an opportunity to check, in a degree, much of the brutality to which the Christian captives were subjected, to comfort them by charging himself with the support of their helpless families, among whom were little children and those whose age made them dependent—all left destitute by the imprisonment of their natural protectors—and, by means of gold, he succeeded, through a trusted agent, to secure the mutilated remains of many of the martyrs for secret burial, or when possible had them conveyed into the Catacombs for interment. His zeal was tireless, and such was his fervor that he was soon admitted to assist at the Divine Sacrifice of the Altar; then, shortly after, followed the heavenly banquet of the Most Holy Eucharist, which filled his soul with divine sweetness, renewed his strength, and fanned his charity to a higher flame.

Nemesius was ready to avow his faith: his old instincts as a soldier made him wish to do so; but the suffering Church needed his services; for, not yet suspected, and having free access to the prisons, he had, as already shown, countless opportunities to comfort and aid those condemned to suffer for the faith. When admission was denied to all else, it was he who, with adoring love, bore upon his breast, wrapped in richest cloth of gold, the consecrated Hosts, to the condemned Christians,—the Heavenly Bread that would

"refresh them by the torrent,"—their Holy Viaticum\* in the sharp, bitter conflict they were to pass through to the embrace of Him for whose glory they were to suffer, and from whose nail-pierced hands they would receive eternal crowns and palms of rejoicing.

The gloom of the prisons was of great assistance to him in his ministrations of mercy, even had the guards kept close watch on his movements, which they did not; for what was there to fear from the great commander of the Imperial Legion, who bore the Emperor's seal, and was doubtless come on some secret errand?

The Pontiff Stephen wished to ordain him priest, but from this high honor his humility shrunk, and he was made deacon. . Can we realize that this is indeed Nemesisus, the proud commander, the laurel-crowned soldier, no longer in glittering armor, no more leading his legionaries under the Roman eagles to fresh conquests, no longer listening to an applauding Senate, and standing on the right of the curule chair, the honored favorite of an Emperor,—this Christian in the garments of peace, whose chosen haunts are the Catacombs and the prisons, and whose sole occupation is that of a servant of the needy and afflicted.

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\* Nemesisus was not alone in the practice of the good work described; there were others besides himself and the wife of Tertullus, who were not suspected of being Christians, likewise engaged.

Yes! this is the noble patrician, the heroic military leader, the reserved, haughty pagan gentleman, whom we knew as Nemesius; but how changed! For in those days of tribulation when one embraced Christianity he came out in deed and in truth from among the wicked and the ungodly; the lines were drawn in blood, and they were as much divided and apart as they will be on that dread day when Christ comes to judge the world.

In the two weeks since his conversion, how much had been crowded into the life of Nemesius can be imagined from the brief outline given—so much and so real in its essence, that his past seemed like a dream, and it was only now that he truly began to live. Every day or two he went to his villa on the Aventine to embrace his child, and, when having ascertained that all was well with her, to confer with Symphronius, who was faithfully executing the tasks assigned him.

All the idolatrous images had been removed from their niches, shrines, and pedestals, to the vaults under the villa, where they were destroyed, and afterwards cast into the limekiln. Some of them were of ancient Greek workmanship, and, as ideals of art, were unsurpassed and of priceless worth; but Nemesius knew that they were the conceptions and symbols of a false religion, and that their perfection was inspired by the belief that the deity represented by a master-hand

in marble would inhabit the statue, if it were found worthy of the honor, and be worshipped through the ages.\*

Thus we see that the greatest and most deathless works of pagan as well as those of Christian art were inspired supernaturally—the first by an idolatrous, the latter by a holy and divine faith.

Admetus proved himself a doughty iconoclast in the work of destruction. To lop off a nose, shave off an ear, strike off one at a time the arms and legs of these gods of stone, who had received divine honors, and still smelt of the spices and Eastern gums that had smoked before them, and then, with a swinging blow of his axe and a hearty "Bravo!" knock the exquisite *torso* to splinters, afforded him the most intense satisfaction. "So perish," he would say, as each one was demolished, "so perish the demons, and all other enemies of the dear Christus!"

Frequent and sweet had been the conferences between the noble matron Camilla and the fair young daughter of Nemesius, whose mind, illumined by the love of Him whose Holy Name her bosom enshrined, received the instructions with docile, unquestioning faith. To her simplicity and innocence, her swift progress in the supernatural life was incomprehensible, even had she dwelt upon the mystery; for the restful joy it brought her, and the love it deepened,

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\* St. Augustine speaks of this in his "City of God."

sufficed without knowledge concerning the operations of grace, which maturer minds seek to understand. Was it not of such as she that Christ spake in these words: "Unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven"?

Whenever Camilla paid her accustomed visit, Zilla did not wait to witness the loving welcome she received from Claudia; it was more than her sensitive, jealous affection could bear; but, leaving them together, she stole away silently, to brood over the evil days that had fallen upon her, and the fateful hour which she knew boded danger and death to the child of her heart.

Presently strange visitors presented themselves at the villa gates, such as had never found admission beyond the stately entrance before—visitors without "sandal or shoon," whose vestments were soiled and tattered—men and women broken down with toil and poverty, some of them decrepit, and almost as helpless as the little children beside them; all wearing a look of patient sorrow on their wan, hungry faces. They were not turned away, as would have been the case a short while before, but brought in, refreshed and fed. Who were they? They were the gleanings of Nemesis in the bloody harvest-fields of the Lord; the destitute ones, left, by the martyrdom and persecution of their natural protectors, to the compassionate care of the faithful.

Old Symphronius was in the secret, also Admetus, who guided them to the villa, and to a certain extent Claudia, who was told that they were the suffering children of the Christus, who loved them, and would receive all that was done for their relief as done unto Himself. This was enough to send her like an angel among them, with sweet, pitying words, and such little ministrations of kindness as their sorrowful plight suggested. She bathed the faces and bleeding feet of the little children, and fed them out of her own hands, winning them to smiles by her pretty ways; then made Zilla turn things upside-down in her own chests and closets in search of raiment to cover them, and what was lacking in fitness she at once ordered to be purchased.

Zilla was nearly frantic with disgust and anger; she was sure that Claudia would get some deadly fever or other disease by contact with such a miserable set, and besought her to forbid their coming, or at least not let them come near the villa to contaminate the air, but be fed at a distance by the slaves. That was the pagan way; but the child, even when she held a cup of cold water to the pale, trembling, parched lips of an aged person who was too far spent to lift it himself, did it for the love and sake of the dear Christus, and found therein too much happiness to answer Zilla's stern insistence more seriously than to throw her arms around her neck, and with her own sweet laugh say: "Do not scold,

beautiful mother! Do I not feed my doves, and sometimes Grillo, just for fun? Why, then, should I not feed these hungry ones, who have none to care for them? They are the children of One I love: how, then, can I turn them away empty?"

Finding remonstrance useless, Zilla went to Symphronius, and gave him a very emphatic piece of her mind for his laxity of discipline, as guardian of the estate, in permitting beggars, who doubtless brought infection with them, to enter the gates, especially when he saw how Claudia was bewitched by them, so that she could not keep away while they remained. "Truly," she added, "have we fallen upon strange and evil days! To be blind was happiness compared with what has followed sight."

"I have orders to let our little lady have her will," answered the old steward, looking up a moment from some long rows of figures he was working out.

"I will speak to Nemesisus himself. Men do not consider the harm that comes of over-indulgence to the immature. It is something new, indeed, for a patrician child to be allowed to mix with such a rabble," she said, with flashing eyes.

"He will be here this evening," was all that Symphronius said; and she withdrew.

True to her word, Zilla sought an opportunity to explain her grievance to Nemesisus. He heard her patiently, knowing what good reason she



had, from her standpoint, for all she urged, and understanding well that love for his child inspired it; so, with a great pity in his heart, and a silent prayer for her conversion, he answered, briefly but kindly:

“It is my wish and her happiness that these unfortunates should continue coming.”

The poor woman made no response—unless the sigh that forced itself from her heart might be called one,—and, folding her pale hands on her bosom, her old gesture of submission, she left his presence.

On every side her love for the child, who from its birth had been to her as of her own flesh and blood, was cast back upon her; a wall of separation, as transparent as air but as impassable as adamant, had risen between them; she felt that in all the strange things that had so lately happened, and the many changes they had brought about, she was no longer necessary to the one only human being that she loved—and her proud, faithful heart was breaking. But she relaxed no tender service she could render; her vigilance was almost sleepless, lest the danger she dreaded might come without word or warning. And, because she loved to hold Claudia near her, and see her bright, beautiful face dimpled with smiles, she cut out and helped to make garments for her “beggars;” and because—perhaps this was the primary reason—the child would be exposed to less danger of infection if the miserable wretches

were clad in fresh, clean raiment, she redoubled her efforts to substitute such for the soiled tatters that in some cases scarcely covered their nakedness.

In the meantime the "mill of the gods" had gone on grinding the fine wheat of the Lord; at the Temple of Mars, in the Flavian Amphitheatre, at the Temple of the Earth, in the dungeons outside the gates and elsewhere in and about Rome, the work went on, as it had been going on year after year, until more than a lustrum had passed, without a sign that it was near the end. It was monotonous, and the spectacle of a martyrdom was too commonplace now to excite much curiosity or interest, except when something more extraordinary than usual attended it. Besides, the Roman people liked extremes; if they had horrors, they wanted an even balance of pleasure and amusement; and, somehow, it happened that just at this time there was more of the former and less of the latter than seemed to them either agreeable or necessary.

Something was at hand, however, that would not only break the present monotony, but give Rome a laugh—under the breath, be it understood—at the expense of Valerian Emperor. It was rumored on a certain day that the Emperor was going to the Temple of Mars, to receive from Laurence the Deacon—the same who had been in chains in the dungeons of Hippolytus ever

since his arrest, and had there exercised those powers attributed by the pagans to magic—the key of the Christian Treasury, which contained, it was asserted, an enormous amount of gold, silver and jewels.

In his rich imperial robes, seated in his curule chair, surrounded by lictors and guards, Valerian awaited his anticipated triumph; for was not he the first of the Emperors who had been able to wrest their concealed treasures from the Christians! And was it not a sign that their cause was weakening and near its end? He was in the best of spirits, and conversed affably with certain of his satellites whom he had invited to attend him.

Opposite to him was the *catasta*, raised by a few steps above the floor of the Prætorium, upon which the criminal usually stood, in view of all present. The Procurator, in official robes, occupied his place; here were the *consilarii*, there the notaries, ready to take down questions and depositions. On one side appeared lictors, the keen edge of the axe bound up with their fasces, turned outward; while against the wall a group of savage-looking men, naked to the waist, waited with implements of torture, ready at a word to spring to their bloody work.

The Prætorium wore the semblance of a hall of justice, but Valerian Emperor presided. There would be no formal trial; he was there to receive, from one prejudged by his own acts, the

concealed treasures forfeited by his crimes to the State, and to deal as the laws of the Empire demanded against conspirators and blasphemers of the gods; but for the sake of appearances it was well for the officials of the law to be present.

Outside, a scene was progressing that baffles description. Rome seemed to have vomited forth all her beggars—halt, blind, diseased,—a hollow-eyed, want-stricken, tattered army of men, women, and children, that, despite the resistance of the guards, gathered around the Temple, pressing upon one another, and overflowing the great portico and pillared vestibule. The hum of their voices, the angry orders of the soldiers, the sound of blows, followed by shrill outcries, reached the ears of Valerian, like the confused roar of a tumult, and a pallid hue stole over his bloated visage. Was there a revolt?—were assassins at hand, who would presently rush in and slay him where he sat? His flesh trembled, his brutal heart grew faint; but suddenly there was silence, and he breathed more freely.

At that moment Laurence, accompanied by Hippolytus and surrounded by guards, was ascending the Temple steps, and when about half way he turned for an instant, confronting the terrified assemblage below, and, lifting his manacled hand, made the Sign of Redemption, and breathed forth his blessing like a heavenly dew upon them; then the guards, recovered from

their surprise, more roughly than before urged his advance.

Although under suspicion of sharing with his family and slaves the delusion arising from the singular events that had so recently occurred in the dungeons of his house, Hippolytus had not been interfered with, but still had the custody of Laurence, as it was believed that through his persuasions, the latter would be induced to give up the treasures he had in charge. This supposition was confirmed by the fact that he had consented to yield his secret.

Hippolytus was not yet openly a Christian. Although grace had touched his heart, and—like Festus—he was “almost persuaded,” so far, he had had no time to weigh the matter. And now what use Laurence expected to make of the mob that, with his co-operation, he had summoned to meet him on this 9th day of August, 258, he was at a loss to understand; but, supposing that these poor wretches were connected in some way with the question of the secret treasures, he gave the holy deacon his own way, thinking that, even should the means seem foolish, the result would prove satisfactory. Accordingly he whispered an order to the captain of the guards as the prisoner entered the vestibule, and those who had been driven back by blows a few moments before were allowed to pour in, until all the available space in the *Prætorium* was filled.

Valerian had been promptly informed of the

harmlessness of the uproar that had so startled him and quite regained his self-possession when he saw the Christian deacon standing on the *catasta*, calmly awaiting his pleasure. The dignified, composed air of Laurence, his serene, fearless countenance, in whose presence he secretly felt his own ignoble inferiority, stung the tyrant, who, however, resolved to control himself until the coveted treasures were in his possession; then—let the Furies dance, and Cerberus whet his fangs!

“Thou knowest why thou art here? Deliver up the key of thy treasury, and designate its location; then, if thou wilt cast a grain of incense in yonder brazier in honor of Jupiter, life and liberty are thine,” said Valerian, in tones which were intended to sound conciliatory, but their coarse rumbling had quite the contrary effect.

“Had I a thousand lives instead of one, I would not cast a grain of incense in honor of thy gods, which are of stone and metal, without sense or feeling,” was the clear, ringing answer, that penetrated every ear in the vast hall. “I have but one life, and that belongs to Jesus Christ, the only True and Living God, whom I serve and adore, and for the love of whom I am ready to suffer death. As to the treasury of the Church, behold it, tyrant! in the poor and miserable congregated here and around this Temple, who have been brought hither by my summons,

that thou mightest see and know that the Church of Christ hoards neither gold nor silver nor precious things, but distributes all to the poor."

The rage of Valerian at an answer that demolished with one blow his avaricious schemes took from him the power of articulate speech, and for a moment or two he roared like an infuriated bull, while every heart quailed before him, not knowing what form his vengeance would take, or on how many it might fall—every heart except that of Laurence, which, uplifted above all tempests of human wrath, had a foretaste of those eternal consolations which would soon reward him in their complete fulness.

At last from the chaos of the tyrant's fury words shaped themselves.

"Seize him, lictors, and scourge him—the liar! the deceiver! the blasphemer of the gods! And disperse yonder rabble!—hunt them down! trample them in the dust!" he bellowed.

While the "rabble," weeping for the teacher who had led them into the way of salvation, and been their provider and consoler, were dispersed, and, with obedient fidelity, "trampled in the dust"—while the lictors were laying bare to his loins the tender flesh of Laurence, Valerian suddenly remembered that it was due to his own dignity to assume an indifferent and impartial air, as of a stern judge intent only on the punishment of an offender against the State; for had he not been publicly duped, and would not al-

Rome make a jest and comedy of his discomfiture? He knew the Roman spirit too well not to feel assured that its satirical wit would break out in epigram and lampoon at his expense; that it would be a sweet nut for the teeth of every vagabond in the streets, and be laughed over equally in the low drinking-slums of the city, as (on the sly) even in the *porticii* of the academies and libraries. Aye! he knew the laugh was against him, and that there was no love for him to keep it back; but woe betide the audacious Christian who had humiliated him!

Aye! woe indeed, so far as he had power over the body. With demoniacal malice he looked on, while the lictors with dexterous blows bruised the flesh of their unresisting victim with their rods—while the scorpion whips of the executioners tore and mangled it, expecting, hoping every moment that he would cry out or moan with excess of pain. But this satisfaction was denied him; for Laurence stood with folded arms and closed eyes, turning himself this way and that, as he was bidden; the edges of his keen sufferings dulled by the contemplation of Jesus in the Hall of Pilate, counting every blow endured for the love of Him precious beyond all price.

Still more enraged by this heavenly composure, which he looked on as defiance, but which the devils who instigated him understood, the cruel Emperor now caused Laurence to be laid upon the rack, and hot plates of iron applied to



his bleeding, quivering sides; but the firmness of the saintly victim remained unshaken, his constancy unmoved, and no sound escaped his lips, except the holy name of Him for the sake of whom he suffered.

A soldier named Romanus, who had been regulating the tension of the rack, amazed at the heroic endurance of the tortured Christian, and touched with an emotion of pity by his sufferings, turned from his screws and pulleys to cast a glance upon him, when his astonished eyes beheld an angel anointing his mangled flesh with healing balms.\* And as he gazed upon the heavenly visitant—by all others unseen—the inspirations of divine grace illuminated his mind. To loosen the handle of the rack, lift the sufferer from his bed of torture, throw himself on his knees at his side and beg for baptism, was the work of a moment; then, before the lookers-on could understand or interfere, he ran out, returning quickly with a copper vessel of water, with which Laurence, rejoicing in the midst of his tribulation, baptized him.

Faith and courage now filled the soul of Romanus; he desired only to suffer the same torments he had inflicted on Laurence; and standing forth and raising his hand to secure attention, in a loud voice he declared himself a Christian.†

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\* It is so recorded in the Acts of the martyrs.

† All that is related of the martyrdom of St. Laurence, and of the conversion and martyrdom of the soldier Romanus, has been gleaned from the "Acts of St. Laurence."

"Scourge the cur within an inch of his life!" roared Valerian from his curule chair; "then may the furies of hell devour him!"

Venting his rage on Romanus until wearied by his invincible constancy, the gentle Emperor wiped his frothing lips, refreshed himself with a draught of cooled wine, then ordered his new victim to be taken outside the gates and executed. And Romanus, who had consoled himself through it all by repeating the holy name he had learned from the lips of Laurence, was led away, outside the Porta Salara, to his death, which, by faith, baptism, and the shedding of his blood for Christ, filled up the measure of his merits, and in a brief space won for him the crown and palm of martyrdom.

By this time Valerian was fatigued, overheated, and—hungry. The supper hour was approaching, and his pampered, luxurious appetite craved its wonted indulgence. He would go to the Baths of Sallust, refresh himself, and return to finish the work so well begun. Having left his instructions with the officials, he went away with his attendants.

The holy Deacon Laurence, without a sound spot in his flesh, was removed (still accompanied by Hippolytus) to another apartment, which opened upon the grove of palms that surrounded the Temple of Mars. Here he was visited and consoled by many of his friends, among them a priest sent by the Pontiff Stephen, from

whom at an opportune moment he received the Eucharistic Bread—the Holy Viaticum, which left him nothing more to wish for on earth.

Hippolytus no longer wavered. Drawn nearer and nearer to Laurence, whose noble virtues and sanctity of life while in his custody had already won the admiration of his honest heart, his conversion was confirmed by the glorious example of his sufferings. Divine love, like a fiery glow, animated his soul; life was nothing—he only wished to declare himself a Christian at whatever cost. But he was restrained by a whisper from Laurence, who saw that his time had not yet come.

Lower sank the sun towards the bright, restless sea; the filmy vapors that draped the sapphire vault above, drifting and wavering in the soft air-currents, were tinted with palest hues of rose and purple; while an iridescent, tremulous golden shimmer, nowhere so bright as in Roman skies, pervaded space. The birds sang on the wing; there was music and laughter and the hum of glad voices in the air, and other signs telling that life was not all bitterness.

Valerian Emperor had refreshed himself with a perfumed bath, put on fresh apparel of purple and fine linen, had his locks anointed with sweet unguents and crowned with laurel; then, having piously offered the customary libations to the gods, he surfeited himself with rich food, and drank his fill of the rich, mellow wines of

Greece, uttering and listening to coarse, lewd jests in the intervals of feasting, until, feeling himself invigorated and in prime condition, he and his satellites went back to the Temple of Mars.

As soon as he was seated, and found breath to speak, he summoned Laurence to his presence. The holy sufferer could not have moved his lacerated, bruised body but for the supernatural strength divinely given, which enabled him to ascend the *catasta* once again, to confront his cruel judge with undaunted firmness; although the marble pallor of his countenance and the purple shadows around his eyes betrayed the physical anguish he endured. Hippolytus stood near, the shadow of a pillar concealing the tears which he sought not to check.

"Has reason returned to thee? If so, cast aside the wickedness of magic, and tell us thy history," hoarsely stammered Valerian, his brain heavy with drunken fumes.

"I am a Spaniard by birth, educated at Rome in every holy and divine law," was the calm reply.

"Sacrifice, then, to the gods. If thou refusest, this night shall be spent in torturing thee," roared the Emperor.

"Ah! my night hath no darkness: everything shines in brightness," responded the holy Deacon, with a smile irradiating his countenance. Heard he the heavenly autiphon:

"Night shall be my light,  
But darkness shall not be dark to thee?" \*

"Beat his sacrilegious mouth with stones!"  
raged Valerian.

The executioner obeyed. The notaries scribbled faster, for the light was fading. Hippolytus drew his toga over his face.

Now was at hand the crowning point of Valerian's infernal malice—his "feast for the gods," which he had boasted to Nemesus that he had in reserve; but for Laurence, the refining ordeal, the triumph, which, like a beacon light pointing heavenward, would shine through the night-shadows of time, until lost in the bright dawn of eternal day.

The Emperor made a sign to the half-naked Numidian savages, who stood awaiting his orders; they left the hall, and brought a framework of iron about a foot high, with iron bars across, upon which the unresisting victim was extended and secured; they then bore him on his rough couch outside the Temple, and placed it over a pit of glowing coals, which cast a lurid glare upon the scene and the grim faces gathered around—falling with softer light through the shadows on a group of Christians, who stood among the spectators, waiting, praying and silently weeping until the end should come.

Quickly the attendants had borne the curule

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\* Psalm cxxxviii. 11, 12.

chair from the Prætorium, that the pious Valerian, in his zeal for the honor of the gods, might witness at his ease the agonies of the tortured Christian, who had blasphemously denied them and defied him. He saw his victim's flesh, penetrated by the fierce heat, begin to shrivel and scorch. It was a brave show for his cruel eyes, but no triumph; for no moan or murmur had yet been wrung from the dying lips: on the contrary, they had only declared his faith, his joy in suffering for Jesus Christ; and from his fiery couch he reproved and warned Valerian as the slow hours dragged on.

"Learn, impious tyrant!" he cried, "these coals are for me refreshing; but for thee they will burn to all eternity. . . . Thou, O Lord! knowest that when accused I have not denied, when questioned I have answered, when tortured I have given thanks." \*

The Numidians stirred the glowing mass of fire to such a heat that they themselves shrunk swiftly back. Again rose the martyr's voice clear on the night, whose darkness was dispelled by the fire that consumed him, while a smile of supernal joy irradiated his countenance: "I thank Thee, O Jesus Christ! that Thou hast deigned to comfort me." Slowly consuming, life still lingered in his tortured frame. The night waned: Laurence already saw the gleaming of a dawn

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\* "Acts of St. Laurence."

which would usher in the endless day; and, while every nerve was stung with unspeakable agony, while heart and muscles melted in the fiery glow, and the marrow of his charred bones withered, he cried out: "I thank Thee, Lord Jesus! that I am found worthy to pass through Thy gates."

It was over; the passion and pain, the bitterness of the worst that could be done by human cruelty instigated by fiends—their malignity aggravated by the knowledge that to harm only the body was the limit of their power—all was past as a dream, and Laurence, like gold refined by the fire, entered with stainless garments into the Land of the Living, to receive the palm and crown he had so valiantly won.

The satisfaction of Valerian was incomplete; he had compassed the death of Laurence, but had failed to reach and drag down the invincible spirit which had soared above him to the end. He felt baffled and vengeful, and retired to his ivory, silk-draped couch to seek oblivion in a drunken sleep.

The body of Laurence was not removed from his iron-grated, fiery couch when life became extinct, but was left to burn until the smouldering coals turned to ashes; and when the dark hour just before dawn wrapped the scene in deeper shadows, the guards, either drunk or overcome with sleep, or perhaps gold, relaxed their vigilance, and there was no sound except the wind among the palms, that sounded like a

low-breathed threnody. Two or three dark figures now emerged cautiously from the shadows towards the sacred remains; with a quick movement, yet reverent and tender, wrapped them in rich stuffs, and glided away as noiselessly as they had come. It was Hippolytus and two other Christians, all disciples and friends of Laurence, who bore away his charred body and concealed it in the Garden of Cyriaca, in a place they had prepared for it.

In the three days that followed, Hippolytus set his affairs in order, liberated his slaves, and distributed his goods to the poor. Not too soon were his arrangements completed, for on the evening of the third day his house was surrounded by soldiers, he was arrested, and taken before the procurator, on the plea of being a magician, and of stealing the body of Laurence. He admitted that he had done so, not as a magician, but as a Christian. The pretence of a trial followed; he was tortured, cajoled; they appealed to his military pride, to his love for his family, and all the horrors that awaited *them* as well as himself, in case he should prove obstinate, were depicted to him; and last of all came a message from the Emperor, offering him honors and riches if he would abandon his new delusion and return to the worship of the gods. But he rejected all for Christ, and submitted to the most cruel tortures, counting all things as nothing for the sake of his Divine Master.



Then his family, with the slaves who had been converted by the preaching of Laurence in the dungeons under his house—among them the old man who had been miraculously restored to sight by the holy Deacon, together with his son—were conducted outside the Via Tibertina, and put to death before his eyes. But his constancy remained unshaken; his fervor only increased; when, finding him impervious to every attempt made to seduce his faith, Valerian Emperor sentenced him to die, but not by any of the usual methods—this was to be something novel, inspiriting, and would delight Rome as a revival of something classic as well as tragic.

On the appointed day, everything being prepared, with the Emperor and all Rome for spectators, two unbroken horses, with wild, fiery eyes, were led forth, their ears lying back, their red nostrils expanded, their veins and muscles strained like cords in their eagerness to break from the restraints of the stalwart Dacian soldiers who held them in. Hippolytus was not appalled by what he saw before him; he had learned how to die, and joyfully yielded himself to the soldiers, who now seized and bound him between the horses, who—suddenly released by the Dacians, and given a stinging blow on their flanks, which was scarcely needed—sprang forward, plunged and reared to free themselves from their strange incumbrance, then dashed madly away. But before their wild race was

over, the spirit of Hippolytus was reunited with that of Sixtus, Laurence, and the martyrs of his own household, who had so brief a time preceded him.

Gods of Rome! have your eyes grown dim, your ears heavy? Have your magicians lost their vaunted skill? Can they no longer work their mighty spells? Have your augurs ceased to read the dreams and portents that shadow coming fate? What strange lethargy has stolen over ye? Does the perpetual incense rising from your altars make ye drowsy, or does the crimson mist ascending from the blood of the holy ones slain in your honor veil from ye the near future and the coming destruction? Can ye not hear the tramping of the armed host marching down through the pleasant Etrurian vales towards the Tiber—a host led by a cross of flame in the heavens, under which in characters of fire is writ: “In this sign conquer?”

Do ye not see, O gods! the great, splendid army of Maxentius—whose proud boast is that he has extinguished Christianity—waiting for the advance of the foe on the hither side of the Tiber, where it flows between Latium and Etruria? Although the time is not quite five decades distant,\* it is not yet too late—if ye *are* gods—to prepare your thunderbolts to destroy the in-

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\*Valerian, 253–260. Constantine, 306–337. Between Valerian and Constantine 46 years.

vader. But ye will not awaken, and the hostile armies meet—the one led by the Cross, the other by the Eagles which have never known defeat. The shock and clash of battle shake the earth and rend the air; Maxentius, wounded and pursued, sinks in his heavy armor under the swift-flowing Tiber; the Eagles fall and are trampled in the dust; the Cross triumphs, and advances to establish the throne of Christ on earth, in the seven-hilled city of the Cæsars.

But the vision does not arouse ye, great gods! Ye dream as if your thrones were founded on eternity, forgetting the Seer from the Euphrates, and his mysterious words on Mt. Phogor, in the land of Moab, seven hundred years before Rome was founded: “They shall come in galleys from Italy; they shall overcome the Assyrians, and shall waste the Hebrews: and *at the last they themselves also shall perish.*”\*

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\* Numbers, xxiv, 24.

## CHAPTER XVII.

A LETTER FOR LAODICE—FABIAN BACK FROM  
UMBRIA—SEQUENCES.

NEMESIUS' letter to Laodice, which he confided to the old steward, was given to Admetus on the following morning, with strict injunctions to obey the instructions he received concerning it. As the latter dropped it into an ingeniously contrived pouch, concealed in the folds of his tunic, his brave, bright eyes gave assurance that he comprehended, and would be faithful to his trust; then, without question or delay, he left the villa.

When the youth reached the imperial palace his business was roughly challenged by the official at the great portal.

"I have a message for the Lady Laodice, to be delivered in person," he answered, modestly.

He was permitted to enter—for no one would venture to interfere with or obstruct the affairs of Laodice, were they great or small—and directed which way to go. After being stopped and questioned here and there by various officials of the palace, he reached the ante-room of her apartments, where he encountered the majordomo of her establishment, to whom he state<sup>d</sup>

his errand. Not pleased at being interrupted in an angry discussion he was holding with a tradesman, about some overcharges he had detected in his accounts, he roughly bade the intrusive young stranger go in and wait. Yes, it was evident to Admetus that he would have to wait; for, although persons were passing to and fro, they were too intent on their own errands even to notice his presence; and he leaned against a column to rest, and bide his time.

Several female slaves, the personal attendants of their lady, now strayed in, and, meeting in a group a short distance from the lad, began to chatter and giggle, and throw saucy glances around in quest of admiration, as well as of any incidental thing that would serve to raise a laugh. They caught sight of Admetus, posed like a fair statue of Hylas against the column, all unconscious of his own classic beauty, and certainly without desire of attracting such attention; and one of them, a pretty young jade, with a significant wink at her companions, danced towards him, and asked what might be his business there at so early an hour. He told her the same thing he had told the others who had questioned him. She laughed good-naturedly, and, with a grimace, hoped he had taken his breakfast before leaving home, as her lady had not yet risen, and might not do so until noon.

"I will wait," he answered, quietly, hoping the girl would go away and leave him alone with

his thoughts; but she was ripe for mischief, and beckoned her companions around her to amuse themselves at the expense of his simplicity.

For a little while they thought they were having everything their own way, for his answers to their silly questions were literal and brief; but, quickly penetrating their purpose, he turned the laugh against them by a few good-natured sarcasms, and a sharpness of humor that admonished them it would be best to leave him to himself. But they were loth to yield him the advantage, and tried their best by cajolery and banter to induce him to confide to them the message of which he was the bearer, declaring that their lady always expected such things to be delivered to her the moment her eyes were open; and if they were delayed, whoever was nearest felt the point of her stiletto, while the others were punished with the lash.

But Admetus was unmoved; it might be as they said, but fidelity to duty was part of his religion, and he continued to evade their curiosity, until, finding their attempt a failure, they left him.

Thankful to be rid of the silly, shameless creatures, the youth found shelter in the embrasure of one of the great windows, where the ruffled plumes of his spirit were smoothed by meditating on the holy things in which his soul delighted. His thoughts wandered away to the dim galleries of the Catacombs; he heard the

sweet, solemn hymns floating through the darkness; he saw the star-like glimmer of tapers where some sacred function was being celebrated, and upon his ear rose and fell the plaintive chaunts of the Church as the torn, broken bodies of the martyrs were deposited like precious jewels in her treasure-house, embalmed by her tears, and glorified by her joy at their victory over death and hell.

The soft touch of a hand upon his shoulder recalled the young Christian from his waking-dream, and he saw a slender, dark-visaged man, whose narrow, glittering eyes were fixed upon his face, standing before him. A sombre-colored mantle, the hood of which was drawn over his head, partially shading his countenance, fell from his shoulders; and so impassive did he look, that, until he spoke, Admetus doubted if it were he that had touched him.

"My mistress, the Lady Laodice, is informed that thou hast a message for her. Thou wilt follow me to her presence," he said, leading the way.

Glad that a successful termination of his confidential errand was at hand, Admetus required no urging to follow his guide. From the antechamber they passed through several spacious communicating rooms, all richly furnished in the luxurious style then prevailing in Rome—each more superb than the last—until the one that terminated the suite was reached. Here

the Cypriot—for it was he—paused, and blew a soft note on a small whistle that hung from his wrist. The heavy curtains were drawn back instantly, and a voice bade them enter. Daylight was excluded from this apartment by hangings rich with gold embroidery, and it was only by the radiance of the perfumed lamp, suspended by fine gilt chains from the ceiling, whose rays glimmered on the most salient points of the splendid appointments, that an idea could be formed of its magnificence.

On a couch, over which was thrown lightly a coverlet of white silk, threaded and fringed with silver, reclined the beautiful Laodice. Her dark, indolent eyes, half veiled by their fringed lids, glanced carelessly at Admetus, as, under the guidance of the Cypriot, he advanced towards her. Raising herself on her elbow, she said, haughtily:

“What message can such as thou have for me, that could not have been given without the intrusion of thy presence?”

“I have only obeyed orders, lady.”

“Whose orders?” she flamed out.

“A letter has been confided to me to deliver into no hands except those of the person to whom it is addressed,” he answered.

“A letter!” she exclaimed; “show it, that I may see if it is for me.”

“Tell me first who thou art, lady, that there may be no mistake,” was the firm reply.



"Tell him," she said to the Cypriot, while a thought and a hope as swift as light sent a quick tremor through her frame.

The Cypriot announced her name and rank.

"It is for thee, lady. Forgive me if I have been over-cautious," said Admetus, as he placed the letter in her hand.

Laodice made a quick sign to the Cypriot to withdraw, and thrust a gold coin into the hand of Admetus which the lad would have refused but for the thought of some half-starved children he knew of, whom it would afford him the means of relieving; for their sake he accepted it with a gesture of thanks, which she did not notice, and left her presence.

When alone she tore open the letter, snapping the silk cords and scattering in fragments the waxen seal that secured it, so wildly eager was she to reach the contents, and realize the hope on which her very life seemed to hang. But when she read the brief lines that shattered her dream, that covered her womanly pride with humiliation, and pierced her heart with the keenest pangs of disappointment, she turned her face to the wall and wept bitterly, and in her despair grasped her stiletto with the intention of ending it all by one suicidal blow; for how could she endure life after this relentless blow?

However, having reached this passionate climax of emotion, a revulsion set in, and grief gave place to rage. She had placed herself at

the feet of Nemesius, to be scorned and pitied, while he boasted of his love for another; to be insulted by his cold wishes for her happiness, and his assurance of forgetfulness. That is how she read his manly, honorable, delicate words; and the more she thought them over the more furious she grew, until her wild, passionate love was turned to deadly hate.

Later in the day the Cypriot was summoned to her presence. Not a trace of the storm of passion she had passed through was discernible; her attire was more than usually rich and becoming, her countenance more haughty, and her wonderful beauty more regal. If there was pallor, it was concealed by artfully-applied cosmetics. Her most costly jewels glittered over her person, and rare perfumes floated around her. She, with some other ladies of rank, had been invited to the imperial table that evening, to sup with two foreign princes who had just arrived in Rome, and she resolved to appear at her fairest, and show no trace of the eclipse that had darkened her hopes.

The Cypriot slave entered and stood before her, his head bowed, his serpent-like eyes cast down, his dark, slender hands folded under his wide sleeves, waiting, yet intently alert. She spoke to him in a low voice, and if her instructions were brief, they were also emphatic; then she emptied gold in his palm as an earnest of future rewards, and not as a bribe to be faithful

to her behests; for Laodice knew the measure of his fidelity, or imagined she did, and would have trusted her life to him. She dismissed him, and once more at her bidding he started, like a sleuth-hound, on the track of the noble Nemesius.

Fabian was still in Umbria when Laurence and Hippolytus won their crowns and palms by sufferings so cruel that even Rome shuddered and sickened at the spectacle. He was enjoying, through all his beauty-loving, sensuous nature, the quiet solitudes and balmy fragrance of the wild, forest-clad hills, where no sound or rumor of the discordant passions of men and their conflicts could reach him, until, having regained the mental poise so rudely shaken by the tragic fate of Evaristus, he decided to return home. Fate and the Furies, he thought, having done their worst, he would from henceforth face the sunshine, and leave the ghosts of the past to oblivion. He little dreamed of what lay before him, and how near it was.

So one day Fabian walked into his palace as if he had left it only an hour before, refreshed himself with a bath, took his prandial meal, drank a cup of wine, and stretched himself upon the pillows of his couch, where he slept until late in the afternoon. When he awoke, fully recovered from the fatigue of his journey, he ordered his horse to ride to the villa on the Aventine, where he hoped to find Nemesius, from

whom he would hear all that was worth knowing, of what had been going on in the Roman world during his absence; and a softer expression stole over his handsome face, as he thought of seeing Claudia, who held a deeper place in his affections than he himself knew.

He had a new pet for his little friend, which he had purchased one day out on the hills from some hunters, who had brought it from the other side of the Apennines, and were on their way to their homes in the valley. It was a species of beautiful little antelope,\* soft and furry, with great, mild eyes, and slender legs. When the hunters killed its mother, it was too young to stand alone, and they had borne it along in their arms, almost humanizing it by their care; so that when they were lucky enough to meet Fabian, it was very tame, which fact increased its value. He gave them their price, and confided the little creature to the care of the peasant-farmer, under whose thatched roof he sometimes slept, and who for a generous gratuity agreed to deliver it safely in Rome, whither he was preparing to go with his olives and sun-dried figs and honey-combs,—a long way to carry his products, but he got a better price for them there than at home.

The peasant faithfully fulfilled his trust, and Fabian was well satisfied on his return to find

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\* Known to us as gazelle.

the pretty, graceful creature arrived, and in good condition. He anticipated Claudia's delight in the possession of such a gentle pet, which she could fondle and love, and her amusement when he would relate all that he had treasured up—facts mixed with fable—for her entertainment; for he counted no stretch of the imagination or poetic license too great, if it won a laugh from her. He thought of her as still blind, and that it was his chief mission upon earth to make her happy, notwithstanding the cruel decrees of Fate.

Fabian was full of pleasant thoughts when he got in sight of the great bronze gates of the villa, but his attention was suddenly arrested by the sight of quite a number of miserable-looking beings who had just issued from the avenue, followed by Admetus, with a basket on his arm, evidently intent on some errand. Hearing the clatter of hoofs on the stony road, the youth looked up in pleased recognition of the noble gentleman, who had always a kind word for him whenever they met. He would have gone on his way, but Fabian drew rein, saying:

"Aha! is it thou, my *choragus*! Tell me, if thou canst, the meaning of yonder miserable procession."

"The times are very hard for the poor, sir, and there are many in Rome who are starving, and some of them come here for alms," replied Admetus.

"It would be more merciful to throw the poor wretches into the Tiber, and so end their miserable existence; but never fear—I will do them no mischief," he said, laughingly, as he noticed the quick shadow that fell over the youth's face. "I spoke in their interests, not my own; for life, my *choragus*, is not worth much even to the most fortunate. Are all well at the villa?"

Answering in the affirmative, Admetus would have passed on had not Fabian tossed him some silver, saying: "For thy poor." With a whispered blessing on the generous pagan donor, he stooped to gather it up, and by the time he had secured the last coin, he was alone, and Fabian was already at the other end of the broad avenue.

When Fabian dismounted, a slave led away his horse; he crossed the portico and went into the Atrium, hoping to find Claudia there, as it was her favorite spot within doors; but all was silent, and only the beautiful lights and golden shadows dancing through the vines over the mosaic floor greeted him. He heard a footstep; it was one of the household slaves who had seen him enter, and come to know his pleasure. "The little lady is in the gardens somewhere," she said, in reply to his question as to the whereabouts of Claudia.

"As I might have known, had I not been stupid," he thought, as he turned to go and seek her. He hastened through the fragrant alleys down towards the old Grotto of Silenus,

expecting to find her and Zilla at the fountain, weaving fresh wreaths for the *Penates*. But another spectacle met his astonished eyes: he saw a number of pale-faced, scantily-clothed little children, some of them leaning over the low rim of the fountain, splashing the water with their hands, while others rolled lazily on the violet-sprinkled grass, happy in the sweet odors and the sunlit beauty of all things around them.

Fabian stood bewildered by the sight, and began to think he must be under a spell of some sort. What could this mean? A swarm of beggars at the gate, and here, in the most private part of the garden, reserved exclusively for the use of the family and their guests, infantile paupers of the rabble class, apparently as much at home as if everything belonged to them! How could he know that these little creatures were the orphans of those who had suffered for Christ, whom Claudia—not understanding all—had taken under her especial care, and made her daily companions? Poor, friendless and sick, she knew them to be the “little ones” of Him she loved, and this was sufficient to enlist her sympathies and endear them to her, and make her joyful in her ministrations to them.

Claudia was near the grotto, training up some vines over a trellis that a recent storm had displaced, concealed from observation herself, but able to see all around her through the green net-

work. She heard footsteps, and glancing out, she saw a tall, handsome stranger approaching, who stopped to gaze curiously at the children, and then cast his eyes around as if in search of something else. She was there alone and unprotected, and a tremor of dismay paled her face; but perhaps he would pass on and take no notice. But instead of passing on, Fabian, who knew every spot she loved, came straight towards her as she stood mounted on a moss-grown stump, holding up the fragrant vines. Seeing that discovery was inevitable, she dropped the vines and stood revealed, an image of loveliness against the dark foliage of the background.

"Have I found thee at last, my pretty dryad?" he exclaimed, in his pleasant, laughing way.

A flush overspread her face, and as she looked gravely and steadily at him, a strange, puzzled expression came into her eyes; but she did not move, she only whispered a prayer in her heart for protection.

"Let me assist thee, dear child; give me thy hand. What! shrinking back from me! How have I offended thee, fair little lady?" he asked, amazed.

"Thy voice sounds like Fabian's—but—" she began, in a low, tremulous voice.

"I *am* Fabian. What spell has come over thee not to know that it is I!" he exclaimed, astonished.

"I know the voice of Fabian, but his face I never saw. I was blind—"



"*Was* blind!" he cried.

"Yes: I was blind from my birth, and if thou art truly Fabian, forgive me for not knowing thee when my eyes for the first time behold thy face! Thy voice is the voice I know so well."

"I *am* Fabian, I call all the gods to witness, and none other—and am beside myself with joy! What! have the gods been at last propitious and given thee sight? I will build a new temple in their honor! Oh, my beautiful one! it is the most joyous thing I ever heard of. Let me look into thy eyes! How they sparkle! how they drink in the light with a flash like wine! I am in a devout humor with the gods, and will never doubt them again!" exclaimed Fabian, in tones of exalted emotion.

"The gods did not give me sight, Fabian," she answered, gently.

"How then—what great physician healed thee?" he asked.

"Jesus Christ gave sight to my eyes; all at once, as the holy water of baptism was poured on my head, the blindness and darkness fled," she answered, her voice full of sweetness, her eyes radiant with faith.

A shock that chilled his blood passed through Fabian; he turned sick and faint, and dared not trust himself to speak. Pagan philosophy offered no shield to avert a blow like this; its feet were of clay, which crumbled before his eyes, leaving him for the moment bereft of strength.

The child's blind eyes had been opened by one of those startling miracles so often wrought by the thaumaturgic skill of the Christian priests, and it was evident that she had fallen under the spell of their delusions. With this conviction there arose instantly and vividly before him the frightful results that were almost certain to follow.

"And thy father, my child?" he at last found voice to ask.

"Oh, Fabian! hast thou not heard? He is a Christian!" she replied, her countenance glowing with happiness.

"I am but just back from the wilds of Umbria," he said, quietly.

This was the last thing that Fabian would have thought of, had any presentiments of evil been haunting his mind. He remembered his long conversation with Nemesisus relating to the ancient and curious predictions of an expected One, who was expected to appear, revive the glories of the Golden Age, and make mankind like unto the gods, and his scornful incredulity; it was only a few brief days ago, and it seemed incredible that so sudden a transformation could have taken place. Nemesisus a Christian! Rather would he have heard of his death; rather a thousand times would he have found the beautiful child, standing there in her fearless innocence before him, dead and beyond the reach of all harm.

Fabian felt as if he had been away a hundred years, instead of a fortnight; and had he only known of these dreadful changes in time, he would not have returned to Rome, but hied away to some corner of the earth where it would be impossible for the news of how it all ended to reach him; for well he knew that in times like these a man so distinguished as Nemesius could not become a Christian with the least hope of escaping discovery, and death attended by cruelties too barbarous to think of. Nor could it be supposed that his child, whose blindness had made her an object of tender sympathy and commiseration in Rome, should suddenly receive her sight without its presently being known.

Should the impending war with Persia soon break out, then there was a hope; for Nemesius—his apostasy unsuspected—could lead his legion away to do battle under the Eagles for the defence and glory of the Empire, as many Christian soldiers had done in times past, while he would find a safe retreat for the child; but, alas! how fatal would be delay!—for her misfortune was too well known to the Emperor, and all who had ever seen or served her, for such a wonder as that which had occurred to be long concealed.

Fabian's mind was torn by contending emotions—not that he cared for the change in its religious aspect, but because he dreaded the consequences for these two who were so near to his

heart. He would not disturb the serene happiness of the beautiful child by question or argument; he would restrain himself until he could see Nemesius, to lay before him the peril in which they both stood, and suggest measures by which they might escape the fate that threatened them.

It had only taken a few moments for these tumultuous thoughts to sweep through Fabian's mind, but they left him shaken to the centre of his being, yet outwardly calm. At last he said, gently:

"And how does the world look to thee, fair child?"

"Oh, Fabian! I have not words to say how beautiful it all appears to me; and when I think of Him who made it, my heart almost bursts with love and gladness," replied Claudia, while the long, white-blossomed sprays she had again gathered up to weave in the trellis dropped from her hands.

"And I—how do I look to thee, sweet one? tell me, if it will not wound my vanity too much," he said, trying to speak in the old way.

"Thy face is strange to me, Fabian," she answered, while a delicate glow suffused her countenance, "and sad; but thy voice is the same I always loved to hear. By-and-by I shall be used to thy face, and love it, too."

"How is Grillo?" he asked, pleasantly.

"Grillo is very well; and, now that he knows

me, follows me, and sometimes lays his head upon my shoulder, and fans me with his long ears," she said, with a little laugh.

"Grillo has the wisdom of a sage: he makes the best of the situation, and neither pines for thistles, or risks his prosperity by unreasonable freaks. Bravo! for the king of the donkeys," said Fabian, laughing; but his words had a covert and bitter significance. "I thought of thee every day, my little cousin, while I was up yonder among the hills, and have brought thee a pet that will rival poor Grillo in thy affections—a gentle, graceful little antelope from Grillo's country, perhaps his cousin; but I see so many strange companions around thee," he said, waving his hand towards the pale-faced children near the fountain, "that I fear he will not find favor with thee. Tell me who they are and whence; for they are so unexpected and out of place that it seems they might have been rained down, like frogs, out of the clouds."

"They are the little ones of the dear Christ; they had none to care for them, Fabian, and were sick and hungry, and I am allowed to keep them at the villa; for they had no homes of their own, and now they are getting strong and merry. Oh! it is a great favor to have them," replied the child, in low, tender accents; "for He loves them, and it makes me glad to serve them for His sake."

"I hope thou wilt love the little antelope,

then, for *my* sake; it is a pretty creature, with eyes as soft and bright as thine, and diminutive enough to be carried about in thy arms; and, better still, it doesn't laugh like the blast of a trumpet, as Grillo does," said Fabian, veiling the bitter pain of his heart under an assumption of the old gay manner. He would ask no question that would seem to be a recognition of the astonishing changes that had taken place in his absence, but, as we see, put them aside as childish fancies unworthy of notice, although he gauged the gravity of the situation to its bitter depths.

"Thank thee, dear Fabian, for thy kind thought of me, and I will love the little creature for thy sake; I love Grillo and my doves, but there's room enough for thy pretty stranger," she answered, with a bright glance. "But come, let us go and find Symphronius that he may order thy favorite dainties and wines."

"I cannot accept thy hospitality to-day, little lady. I will see Symphronius a moment, to leave a message with him, then hasten away to an engagement in Rome; meanwhile remain where thou art to finish the task I interrupted, and be happy with thy frogs," he said, laughingly, as he nodded towards the children, and walked swiftly away.

The old steward, oppressed by the heat, had just left his desk and gone to a window for a breath of fresh air. The very first object that

met his sight was Fabian, coming with hasty steps towards his office. "It is the beginning of sorrows," thought he, while his heart gave a great thump; and he made the blessed Sign of the Cross upon his breast, commending himself to the protection of God. How could he tell Fabian of the great events that had taken place while he was absent? How find courage to announce that which, he feared, would disrupt the friendship and love of a lifetime? He advanced to welcome him, however, as he entered, with his usual kind, courteous greeting, but, as Symphronius remarked, without the genial smile and jesting words that had heretofore always characterized his salutation. It was a great relief to him, therefore, when he discovered that Fabian's only object was to inquire where he should be most likely to find Nemesius in the city, and when he might be expected at the villa; but the old steward could give him no certain information on either point.

"My master," he said, "has obtained leave of absence from his military duties, and is occupied with his private affairs, which, having been neglected for years, require his attention; but if the illustrious signor will leave a letter I will send it by his messenger, who comes daily with words to our little lady."

"Christianity, secrecy and mystery, always and in hand," thought Fabian, as he seated himself to write to Nemesius, urging an inter-

view wherever he might appoint; then, having secured the letter in the usual way with twisted threads of silk and a seal, he arose to go. No: he would take no refreshment; he was not feeling well, he told Symphronius, who wished to spread a dainty repast for him, and went away with the heaviest heart he had ever known.

Had not the persecution been raging, Fabian's latitudinarian principles in matters of religion would have enabled him to regard the conversion to Christianity of a man of such distinction as Nemesius as an eccentricity which he could have made a jest of; he would only have thought he had lowered his patrician rank, and possibly damaged his career, by giving up old traditions and the religion established by the State, for new-fangled doctrines and delusions; otherwise, it would not have affected their friendship a single iota, at least so far as he was concerned.

Fabian had no veneration for the gods, but he thought that an established system of belief was conducive to individual and social order and public prosperity. Like the fasces of the lictors, which bound together resisted all effort to break them, but disunited could be singly snapped asunder by a child, he saw strength in unity, and looked upon innovations as disintegrating and destructive; but the persecution he thought worse than the innovations it attacked and sought to exterminate. And now the only friend he loved on earth had chosen this time to commit



the supreme folly which could only be expiated by the sacrifice of his own life and that of his child. He was nearly distracted under the calm exterior which by a strong effort of his will he compelled himself to wear.

When at last Fabian and Nemesis met at the palace of the former, the soul of each was tried to the very limits of endurance by what passed between them. Knowing Nemesis as we do, it is easy to imagine the courage, firmness and constancy with which he declared his faith, and related the circumstances that led to his conversion, and the warning, pleading arguments he used to persuade Fabian to cast aside his idolatrous errors, and accept the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. It is easy also to imagine Fabian's worldly, plausible, sophistical arguments in reply; his logic, sharpened by satire; his passionate philippics against Christianity, which, all summed up, meant that Nemesis was guilty of the most culpable foolishness in risking honors, fortune, life, and the life of his child, for a creed which the wisest philosophers of the times declared to be false and delusive.

He did not spare Nemesis, but his tears flowed even when his words were the most cutting and severe; for, like a skilful surgeon, he knew that to heal he must first wound. But Nemesis having counted all earthly things as dross and nothingness in comparison with the higher and eternal good for which he had relinquished them,

the words of his friend were as "tinkling cymbals," and his arguments like water melting in the sand. It was only Fabian's pain that touched him, for he knew that it was the outcome of his great, unselfish love for him.

The interview had been peculiarly painful to both, for the tie between the two men was closer than that of brotherhood. A glorious and assured recompense awaited the sacrifice of Nemesius; but for Fabian, who looked not beyond earthly limits, there was only despair. The lamp above them gleamed low; and the dawn, now stealing faintly through the open windows, revealed on their pale countenances traces of the crucial pain they had endured—one marked by divine faith, the other lined by the passionate sorrow of defeat.

"At last," said Fabian, breaking silence, "and while there is yet time, take the child and fly to some remote region for safety. My pleasure-galley lies at Ostia, and everything can be got in readiness before the sun sets to-day."

"I am a soldier, Fabian, and have always followed the Roman Eagles where they led, without question or thought of the perils to be faced; and now that I am a soldier of Jesus Christ, with His Cross for my standard, shall I do less? No: I will not fly," answered Nemesius.

"And the child—thy lovely Claudia! Why subject her to the same cruel fate so eagerly courted by thee? Oh, Nemesius! unfeeling pa-

rent! How canst thou bear the thought of her being killed by wild beasts, or cast into the flames? Gods! the very thought of it maddens me!" exclaimed Fabian, his face ghastly white.

Nemesius folded his hands and bowed his head; for here was the human, vulnerable part through which his nature might be wounded unto death.

He did not speak for some moments: he was silently offering the dread anguish that wrung his soul with generous love to Him through whose Passion and Death redemption had come to mankind.

"A few short pangs, and then eternal life!—I can ask nothing more precious for my little one, should He in whom we trust will it so," he said at last. "My Fabian, let us not speak of this again."

"My life-long friendship for thee, my love for her, forbids silence. Listen, Nemesius: I must speak! Since thou art so set on thy own destruction, confide Claudia to me. I love her as tenderly as if she were my own offspring. I will take her away to a home in one of the pleasant lands I know of, and all that I possess shall be hers; and she shall be guarded as the most precious treasure of my life," urged Fabian.

"Ah! my Fabian, how thou rendest my heart! By consenting to thy generous wish I should risk her eternal salvation. Better she should be safe in heaven than live without faith on earth; for she is of tender age, and with no one to encour-

age and guide her, tempted and warped through her affections, there would be danger of her losing the inestimable graces that are now hers. These grown weak, faith would gradually expire in her soul. No: I dare not consent," said Nemesis, in a voice that betrayed his emotion.

"Hast thou gone so mad that thou wilt even take no precautions for thy safety? Thou canst not long escape; thy position and fame are too distinguished for that which thou hast done to escape detection," exclaimed Fabian.

"I am in the hands and at the holy will of Him who created and redeemed me. I have no wish, no hope, no plan that reaches beyond that," he said, in grave tones, which had in them an exultant ring. "Remember, Fabian," he added, after a momentary pause, "that it was from thy lips I first heard the wonderful story of the divine Christus, which sunk deeper than I then knew, and led me to consider, even while I scoffed, the possibilities of its truth. He is indeed the long-expected Messiah of the world-old prophecies, the very Son of God—the Saviour who has in our nature overthrown the adversary of our souls, and won from God that clemency for fallen man which He refused to the revolted angels. Thy passion for curious investigation has led thee unwittingly to a dim knowledge of the truth, wherein thou art privileged above many; this knowledge supplemented by grace—which only awaits the action of thy own will

and desire to receive it—will open to thee the inexhaustible treasury of faith and holiness, with all its fulness and perfection of knowledge, whose divine heights, without it, no mortal can ever reach. Be persuaded, then, to throw aside all human motives, all vain philosophy, and seek only the truth as it is in Jesus Christ."

The words of Nemesius were rendered more impressive by a sudden golden glow which at this moment the newly-risen sun flashed through a window, crowning his noble head as with a halo.

"My Achates!" said Fabian, with a wan effort to smile in his old gay, winning way; "I am not prepared either to discuss or accept mysticisms which have brought into my life its first real bitterness. The appearance of the Christus, coincident with the ancient predictions and the phenomenal enthusiasms resulting therefrom, I regard only as singular facts in the world's history—mental disturbances which seem to lie beyond the knowledge of natural laws. The only thing I am entirely sure of at this moment is my friendship for thee, my Nemesius, which no mortal power can shake."

He arose, and threw his arm around the shoulders of Nemesius, while tears dimmed his eyes.

"And yet, my Fabian, thou art willing to let death dissolve a friendship as dear to me as to thyself, by rejecting the only condition which would ensure its eternal continuance," said Ne-

mesius, with deep emotion, as he embraced him. "Now, farewell! I have an assurance that fil's me with hope for thee."

And so they parted, Nemesius going away towards the Via Latina, while Fabian flung himself upon his couch to seek repose after the agitations of the night, firmly convinced that he might as well by a wave of his hand expect to remove grim Soracte from its foundations, as to endeavor to shake the constancy of Nemesius in what was evidently to him a vital and eternal principle.

Fabian was convinced that indifference to beliefs and dogmas, as taught by his favorite Pyrho, was not a safeguard to tranquillity and happiness; far better for him, he now thought, had he adopted the stern philosophy of Zeno, which would have raised him above the passions and emotions of humanity. But vain regrets were only weakness, and there was nothing left him to do but to fight his battle out as best he could, without taking the world into his secret.

On the following day he prepared to go his customary rounds—to the Forum, the Baths, look in, perhaps, at the Theatre, should anything new be going on, and make a visit or two. Never before had Fabian been so fastidious in the choice of his apparel, the draping of his toga, the splendor of the few jewels he wore, and the quality of the perfume sprinkled in his hair, curling in short, silk rings all over his statu-

esque head. Dismissing his servant, he made a critical survey of himself in his Egyptian mirror, and was annoyed to discover that he was unusually pale, and that there were dark shadows under his eyes—traces of the passionate emotion he had suffered.

"I will only have to smile the more, and be careful that my smiles do not become grins; then, if comment is made, I shall have to draw on my fever of a *lustrum* ago as the cause," said Fabian, turning away with a short, bitter laugh, which ended in a sigh by the time he stepped into his chariot.

With the sensations of one not yet fully recovered from a horrible nightmare, he drove slowly along the sloping avenue of the Palatine, that led direct to the Forum Romanum, an edifice which, neither spacious nor magnificent, lent its name to all the space lying between the Capitoline and the Palatine Hills. It was surrounded on every side by temples, conspicuous among which were the Temple of Janus and that of Vesta; palaces, basilicas, halls of justice, and public offices, and adorned with the statues of illustrious Romans, triumphal arches, and the trophies of conquered nations. A place of public assembly, and an important centre of varied interests, all the news, political, sensational and social, rumors native and foreign, and the latest whispers of prominent events, were borne there from every quarter by those who resorted to it

for business or pleasure. The gravest transactions before the judicial tribunals, affecting life, honor, and estate, the most splendid efforts of oratory from the Rostra on exciting topics, and the chance that every one would here meet every one they knew, drew the Roman world of all classes, variously attracted, to the Forum.

The glory of the Roman sun now bathed the marble porticoes, pillars, arches, and carved façades in such effulgence that the noble grace of every outline was visible, while the golden glamour veiled all discolorations made by time and weather, until only a dazzling mass of triumphant art greeted the eye wherever it turned; but it was lost on Fabian, so preoccupied was he, until when near the Temple of the Vestals, he was recalled to himself by finding his further progress checked by a crowd who waited per force, until a procession which slowly emerged from the massive gateway should have passed on its way. A curtained litter, borne carefully by eight slaves, now appeared, followed by numerous attendants, whose countenances were sad and downcast. They moved slowly, and the street throngs, silent and respectful, made way, for they knew that a sick Vestal was being conveyed to the palace of some matron of high rank, to be nursed back to health, or, if Fate so decreed, to die.\* The litter passed; the living tide

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\* As was the custom.



that had parted and paused a moment, again mingled together, and with its dull roar of human voices, rumbling of wheels, and the hoof-beats of horses, surged on as before.

The delay had only been momentary; a few paces farther on, and Fabian had thrown the reins to one of his attendant slaves, sprang from his chariot, mounted the broad marble steps, and was sauntering leisurely through one of the lofty, pillared halls in the interior of the Forum, where he met a number of his acquaintances, singly and in groups, who saluted and welcomed him back to Rome with genial effusion. Each one had something to tell of how things, social and political, had been going on while he was away among the Umbrian Hills.

Among other *on dits*, he heard how an audacious Christian, named Laurence, had made amusement for Rome by outwitting the Emperor, who caused him to be roasted alive for his temerity; that Hippolytus, a man of distinction and wealth, well-known and of high repute, had—incredible as it might seem—been seduced by the magic arts of this same Laurence, and publicly declared his belief in the Christus, while he contemned the gods; that his family and household, sharing his delusion, were put to death before his eyes—a well-merited punishment,—after which he was strapped between two wild horses, who tore him asunder, limb by limb, in their mad race.

How they gabbled and laughed as they talked it all over, as if it had been a new comedy or a gladiatorial contest, one supplying details omitted by the other, sparing no cruel horror, until Fabian had the whole story complete! They regarded both affairs as parts of a fine spectacular tragedy; they thought such examples necessary to strike terror to the minds of those wily conspirators known as Christians; while only one—under his breath—asserted that Rome did not require the littleness and abasement of such savagery to sustain her grandeur and power,—savagery that not only brought reproach on her vaunted civilization, but retarded progress.

Fabian would have been better pleased had he heard nothing about it; his mind was too sore with dread for the two beings on earth he most loved not to feel every word touch his wound like fire; but he could not avoid it without attracting comment or seeming abruptly rude; he could only evade the subject by irrelevant remarks, and sarcastic criticisms more than usually pungent, which produced an impression that the whole matter was of such supreme indifference to him as not to be worthy of a second thought; as it would have been, in fact, but for the mental application he made of it in regard to Nemesius and Claudia, whose morrow held the rack, the lions, the flame.

Pleading engagements, Fabian left the company with his usual easy grace, and drove from

palace to palace, to call on certain noble Roman ladies, to whom his visits were always as white marks on their calendar, and who afterwards declared that never had their amiable guest been so brilliant and winning, so gay and delightful, as on this day. Conscious of this himself, he felt satisfied that he was wearing his mask bravely, and that his smiles were successful counterfeits.

As he was leaving the palace where he had made his last call, followed by the admiring glances of lustrous eyes, a rose in his hand—the gift of the most beautiful woman in Rome—and was stepping across the marble-flagged footway to his chariot, he was stopped by an acquaintance, who declared that he was the man of all others he most wished to see; for there was no one in the whole world who would so keenly appreciate that which he had in store for him; adding that he had been to his palace in search of him, and just as he was about giving up in despair, here he was.

“Has the Sphinx revealed her secret? It can surely be nothing less, my Tullius,” answered Fabian, laughing.

“Something far better! That secret, whenever it comes forth, will be a grim one, depend on it; so I, for one, am satisfied to let her keep it hidden in her stony breast forever. But come: I am impatient for thee to enjoy a pleasure provided by the gods,” insisted the other.

"If thou wilt excuse me, Tullius. I am really not in a mood for anything spectacular to-day, especially if there's a smell of blood in it; for I am having some gentle reminders of my old fever—"

"No, by Apollo! It is whispered that there will be no more fights between the Christians and the lions; for it is said there are signs that the heroism displayed by the former is demoralizing the people. As to thy quartan-ague, or whatever else it may be, the spectacle I allude to will break its evil spell by its novelty; for nothing exactly like it has ever been seen in Rome before. I learn this from the best authority. It is said to be something so idyllic as to remind one of a Greek fable. It is brought hither from Spain, and everyone is wild to see it. It comes on as an inter-act between the chariot-races and the Greek athletic contests, and after it is over we can go to the Baths of Sallust, to feast and amuse ourselves," rattled Tullius.

"Thou hast at least convinced me that I have yet a spice of curiosity left, and I yield myself to thy guidance. My chariot seats two; get in, and we'll soon reach—where?" said Fabian, really glad to accept anything that promised to divert his mind from its ever-present pain.

"The Flavian Amphitheatre—did I not tell thee? If we start at once, we'll be just in time to select seats," said Tullius, well pleased to have secured his object.

A quick drive brought them to the Flavian, which was surrounded by the usual mixed assemblage of all classes—Senators, civic officials, priests, soldiers, freedmen, women, children, and slaves—all pressing their way towards the entrances assigned to each grade; while the air resounded with a tumult of voices, laughing, cheering, swearing, and shouting; the crowd momentarily increased by the human tide that poured down the Via Sacra.

Fabian and Tullius edged their way skilfully through the throng, procured tickets for numbered seats, and pushed on, up the crowded steps to the interior circle of the vast Amphitheatre,\* where without difficulty they found their designated places.

While the vast circumference of the immense edifice is rapidly filling, from the *podium* to its very cornice, a glance at some of its most striking features will give a faint idea of the magnificent effect of the whole. The wall surrounding the arena to protect the audience from the wild beasts is fifteen feet high, pierced with numerous doors, faced with rare marbles and surmounted by a trellis-work of brass, behind which runs a marble terrace, a portion of which is occupied by a double row of chairs appropriated to the exclusive use of those who are, or have been, Prætors,

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\* The Flavian Amphitheatre had a capacity for seating eighty-seven thousand people, with standing room for twenty-two thousand more.

Consuls, Ædiles, Curules and Censors. Distant from these, in his special seat of honor, is the Flamen Dialis—the high priest of Jupiter—in the robes belonging to his ancient dignity, his brow crowned with the fleece which borders his cap that is finished on top by a point of olive wood. Some of the minor flamines attend him, forming a striking group. Further on, and distant from its surroundings, is the marble gallery—encrusted with marvels of sculpture and rich in all its appointments—assigned to the Vestal Virgins, who, white-robed and veiled, have just taken their seats, and look like a snow-drift amidst the varied colors visible everywhere around them. Apart from these, the rest of the immense circle, which is divided at regular intervals by superb pillars of polished marble that support the tier above, and the *vomitæ*, which, like the spokes of a wheel, run from the *podium* up to the cornice and afford easy access to the various ranges of seats, is occupied by the privileged classes, distinguished foreigners and patricians. The tier above, where the marble seats are cushioned, belongs to Senators and the Equestrian orders, and illustrious Romans. The tier above is assigned to the *populus*, the third to the lower classes; above them is a colonnade for women, who are admitted when there are to be no contests between naked gladiators. The plebeians occupy the middle seats, no longer wearing black, a custom abrogated by one of the Cæsars,

whose eye was offended by the sombreness of their apparel. Chattering, laughing, good-natured crowds stream up the *vomitoreæ*, eager to be seated before the show begins.

The spectacle is magnificent! Tens of thousands of human faces tier above tier, masses of brilliant coloring, the flash of polished bucklers, groups of distinguished dignitaries in rich robes and jeweled insignia, gay young patricians attired in all the splendor of the latest fashions, and everywhere—for this occasion—beautiful dark-eyed women sparkling with gems and tossing their peacock fans, while they chatted gayly with brothers, lovers and friends who might be in attendance, while overhead, slightly swaying and undulating in the summer breeze, the *velarium* intervened to shade the audience from the heat and glare of the sun. The disc-like arena was smoothly covered with saw-dust and coarse sand, except here and there where a closely-grated door appeared, through which low thunderous growls or savage bellowings ascended, reminding one of the lions and other savage beasts confined in the vaults beneath.

Like a field of grain suddenly swayed by a passing wind, this vast assembly was at once moved by a simultaneous impulse—every eye was directed towards the superb gallery opposite the main entrance; a shout arose, re-echoed by the enormous walls and beating against the *velarium* until every rope was strained: “Ave Im-

perator!" as Valerian, attended by lictors, courtiers and the Imperial Guard, entered and took his seat on the *cubiculum* or elevated chair he always occupied by right of his supreme rank. There was a blare of trumpets, then as if by a spell silence and expectancy fell upon the people.

Suddenly one of the doors in the wall of the arena was thrown open, the portcullis was swiftly raised, and a magnificent black bull, with white polished horns, wild, glaring eyes, massive head and neck, and thin, sinewy hips, bounded into the arena with a mad roar; dazzled by the light, the space, and the thousands of human eyes bent upon him, he stood dazed and motionless, but only for an instant; for the same door which had given him admittance was thrown open, and there dashed through a *cacciatore*, fancifully dressed, splendidly mounted, with spear at rest, from which fluttered a scarlet flag. He caracoled jauntily around the arena, displaying fine tricks of horsemanship, and the grace and beauty of his steed, which was light of limb, sinewy, bright-eyed, alert, with waving, glossy mane and tail.\*

By this time the bull, having recovered from his dull astonishment, became more alert, following with sullen eyes the horse and his rider, who waved and fluttered his scarlet flag as he dashed in narrowing circles around him. Sud-

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\* Bull-fights were known in Rome in the days of Juvenal.



denly and almost at the same moment the horse felt a prick of the spur, and sprang forward, as the bull, goaded by the point of the *cacciatore's* spear, and nearly blinded by the quick slaps of the scarlet flag across his eyes, was roused to a vengeful and ungovernable fury.

Then ensued, on the part of the bull, a series of plunges, attacks, and a hurling of himself like a thunderbolt on his adversary; and on the part of the *cacciatore*, a series of dexterous feints and hairbreadth escapes, due to his splendid equestrian skill. He was greeted with wild plaudits from the excitable spectators, until at last, when it seemed impossible that he could much longer escape being tossed and gored to death by his frenzied adversary, he made a sharp, sudden turn, and, before the infuriated, clumsy beast could check the impetus of his mad pursuit and double on him, reached the door by which he had entered; the portcullis was swiftly raised, and, waving his plumed cap towards the Emperor's gallery, he leaped through, and the bars fell with a clang in the very face of his enemy.

The bull, now wrought up to the desired pitch of brutal rage, did not stand on the order of his attack when another mounted *cacciatore*, attired and equipped like the first, leaped into the arena; but he was either more reckless or not so skilful an equestrian, or perhaps the bull's instincts were quickened by the magnificent fury he was in, for at last he made a successful lunge; his

sharp horns pierced and ripped the belly of the horse, who fell with his rider. In another instant, above the cloud of sawdust and sand raised by the fray, a fluttering heap of scarlet and yellow was flung in the air, and dropped with a heavy thud to the ground. Then sounded the plaudits of the people long and loud for the bull, who was ramping around the arena, tossing the sand and sawdust up in yellow clouds, his savage bellowing resounding louder than the roaring of the human throats that lifted their bravos in his honor.

Was it over? Was this all? If so, it was a commonplace and small affair to those present, who had seen hundreds of savage beasts from the jungle and the desert fighting together there in the arena; who had witnessed the gladiatorial contests, and beheld Christians torn to death by lions and tigers. No, it was not all: a postern is opened; the wild piaudits are hushed, and a woman's voice, singularly clear and sweet, was heard like flute-notes on the air; it grew more distinct and near, and a beautiful, dark-eyed maid, in the peasant dress of Hispania, her arms and feet bare, her black, silky hair bound by a silver fillet around her head, falling loose over her shoulders, appeared on the scene, still singing a wild lay of her native valley.

The bull was standing, head down, lashing the air with his tail—not spent, but waiting, his fury whetted for another victim—when the girl's

sweet voice reached him. He listened, slowly lifted his great head, raised his bloodshot eyes, saw her advancing towards him; the angry, vibrant tail dropped; she drew nearer and nearer, and stretching out her arm threw it across his neck, while with the other hand she smoothed his grizzled forehead and throbbing nostrils, still singing her wild peasant song. She laid her cheek on his dusty, sullen face, wiped the bloody froth from his mouth, and with gentle insistence led him away as one leads a lamb.

There was a sentiment in this unexpected *finale* of the spectacle which somehow took the popular heart by storm; a roar of applause filled the vast walls like a burst of thunder; even the Emperor signified his approval by sending some gold coins to the peasant maid of Hispania. And while they are venting their emotions it may be stated that her wild, sweet strain was not an incantation, nor her mastery over the great brute due to magic arts, as many thought, but to the power of human kindness; for she had trained and cared for him since he was a weanling, sheltered and fed him in winter, led him to green pastures and by pleasant waters in summer, hung garlands of wild flowers on his horns, and been his good comrade and friend all the time, until he obeyed only her, and in his ferocious moods could be quelled by no other voice than hers. And so the two, bound together by this strange friendship, had been persuaded by

certain purveyors of novelties for the theatres in Rome, who were traveling in Hispania, to return thither with them.\*

"It was not an inter-act after all, though rather pretty for a change. Shall we wait to see the chariot-races?" said Tullius, politely suppressing a yawn.

"I must beg thee to excuse me," replied Fabian. "I have seen enough to-day to satisfy me. Another spectacle would obliterate, I fear, the really pleasant fancies left by the charming one we have just witnessed. Ah! I see that bright eyes and fair hands are already inviting thee. Farewell, and many thanks for the pleasant hour."

The spectacle had been a living symbolism to Fabian, and he wondered if the ferocious, selfish, brutal world might not be better led by human kindness than by force and the shedding of blood; if yet from some distant realm a pure, simple, virginal soul might not appear, chanting hymns of peace to subdue to sweet submissiveness the ungovernable, tyrannical, and cruel passions that dominated mankind. Had Rome sought by other means than the rack, the sword, the flame, to win the Christians from their illusive *dementia* to a proper sense of what they owed the gods and the Empire, how different

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\* An incident like the one described was witnessed in Spain by a traveler of our times.

might have been the results! He cared nothing for the Christians; the word had but one meaning for him now—Nemesius and Claudia; but barbarity of every sort was supremely disgusting to his refined nature.

Ah! could Fabian only have believed it, the virginal soul had already appeared; the hymn of good-will and peace had echoed through the midnight skies of Judea two hundred and fifty-eight years before, to herald the birth of the Prince of Peace; and the only ears that had hearkened to the strain, and followed whithersoever it led, were the despised class known as Christians. Would he ever know?

The daily current of life glided on smoothly at the villa on the Aventine, although there were imperceptible changes which did not appear on the surface. The soft-eyed little antelope, which Fabian brought from the Umbrian hills to Claudia, had become perfectly docile to her tender care—followed her when she walked, gambolled around her, or lay contentedly at her feet when she rested, and reposed on its silken cushion by her couch when she slept. Its gentleness, its grace, and the tender look of its large, mild eyes, gave her pleasure, and the natural kindness she had for all dumb creatures ripened in this instance to affection. Through all created things, animate and inanimate, her heart beat responsive to Him who created them, without laborious effort to link cause and effect together,

but with a great, innocent, spontaneous love, which flowed back to Him from whom, she now comprehended, all things that were had proceeded.

There was at this time a slight change in Zilla, almost imperceptible at first, but becoming more apparent. When first brought face to face with Christianity in the persons of those she loved, her strong soul was shaken; she felt that all she had ever cherished as most sacred, was being outraged and disrupted by an incredible delusion; but after the first shock had passed, her intelligent mind vaguely suggested to her to endeavor to discover the cause and reason of the potent spell which the new religion exercised over not only the simple and ignorant, but the learned, the distinguished—patricians, heroes, and those most noted for their refinement and cultivation. So now when Camilla came to the villa, instead of going away, as she had done heretofore, she remained under some pretence or other, and in silence listened to her instructions and her conversation with Claudia.

Camilla, who had been from the first attracted by Zilla's statuesque beauty and unstudied dignity, and knowing something of her history and her long, faithful service, hoping to win her to Christ, always behaved graciously to her, and latterly in a spirit of quiet friendliness, which Zilla found it impossible to resist. But Camilla's vigorous words, which, not being addressed to

her, she could not with propriety answer, sometimes made her wince; as one day, almost without relevancy, the noble lady exclaimed, with fine enthusiasm: "Yes: this holy faith taught by Jesus Christ, this only true religion, has alone been able to manifest that the gods of the nations are most impure beings, who desire to be thought gods, availing themselves of the names of certain defunct souls, or the appearance of mundane creatures, and with proud impurity rejoicing in things most base and infamous as though in divine honors, and envying human souls their conversion to the true God!\* Such are the deceitful deities we once worshipped."

The words graved themselves on the mind of the silent woman, as the speaker hoped they would; but she made no sign.

Every evening Claudia nestled in her arms when the day was spent, and poured out in her artless way the fulness of her innocent heart, her love for the dear Christus, and all that Camilla had told her of His wonderful life, from His nativity to Calvary, from Calvary to heaven, in all of which was blended the sinless Virgin Mother—*Advocata nostra*—Her joys, Her sorrows, which no other sorrows had ever equalled. She told her of the angels, the fair ministering spirits of God, whom He appointed to guard the souls of His creatures from evil; and she never

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\* St. Augustine: "City of God."

wearied of repeating over and over again, with every particular, the miracle of the healing of her blind eyes.

Zilla took it all to heart through her love; her child had been blind from her birth, but could now see—a fact which no logic nor sophistry could subvert or change; but she was far from being prepared to assign the result to the Christ as a divine power. And when the possibility flashed across her mind, like a flicker of lightning over a darkened sky, that all claimed by the Christians *might* indeed be true, she flung the thought from her as she would have done a serpent; for with it came a vision of torture and death for the child of her heart, which, between her love and dread, nearly drove her to despair.

It was one of Claudia's greatest pleasures to go every morning to speak to the poor, who came daily to the villa to receive alms. Followed by Zilla, with a light basket containing white bread and wine, she always carried in her own hands delicacies to distribute to the sick and aged. While passing among them one day like a ministering angel, the child heard two women talking to each other of friends and relatives of their own who had suffered for Christ; they spoke of Laurence and Hippolytus, and their glorious testimony in the face of torture and death. A shudder passed through her tender frame; it was the first she had heard of the cruel persecution; she did not quite understand, and refrained from



questioning the women, who, she saw, were weeping, but resolved to ask her father and Camilla, and learn the truth from them. Zilla had also heard fragments of the same kind of talk, and with a wrathful, breaking heart she insisted on Claudia's coming away.

Among other pensioners, there had appeared one day a lame, bowed, white-bearded man; his manner was humble and unobtrusive, his words few. He was a Christian, he said, and his limbs had been broken on the rack. No one doubted him, and he received the alms given him, with a blessing on the hand that bestowed it. He gleaned from his companions in misfortune, and without asking a question, information of the beautiful, golden-haired child, whom he saw so liberally dispensing gifts and sweet, cheering words to all, and how she had been born blind, but had miraculously received her sight through the prayers of the holy Pope Stephen.

The next time he appeared, he thanked all for their kindness, and said he would not come again, as he was going South to relatives who had offered to provide for him. Of their little they gave him part, and promised their prayers for his safety and eternal consolation; and he went away followed by their blessings.

The lame beggar was the Cypriot, the spy of Laodice.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## IN THE SHADOW OF THE PALMS.

IN the soft splendor of a summer evening, musical with the flute-notes of birds, the play of fountains, and the whispering of leaves, while the sun flashed a line of gold along the crests of the distant mountains, tinting the drifting clouds and sparkling on lofty temple and ruined fane alike, Nemesius told his little daughter of those heroic souls who, refusing to deny Christ, gave their lives in testimony of their faith. He had for some days debated with himself if it would not be best to do so, but now she had of her own accord asked an explanation of what she had accidentally overheard; and, although it gave him a bitter pang to acquaint her with the cruel realities of the persecution which they both might soon be called upon to share, he did not shrink from the task. She was only a child, whose life, except for the blindness that for a time clouded it, had been like a summer day; she had never beheld suffering, or felt pain, or even heard of violence, cruelty, or bloodshed; and he feared that without some preparation her heart might faint with terror, and the weakness of childhood give way to the horror that threatened her, should the test come.

Seated close beside him, her head against his shoulder, and her hands clasped over his arm, she listened, looking far away into the golden glow, a sweet, wondering, half-expectant look upon her face.

"Does it make thee afraid, dearest?" he asked, finding she did not speak.

"I am not afraid—oh! no: I was thinking. It may frighten me, my father, if those cruel ones try to make me deny the dear Christus; but I will never, never do it—even if they kill me! Then He will know that I love Him more than my own life," she answered, with simple fervor.

"And thou wilt behold the glory of His countenance; He will crown thee with everlasting rejoicing, and with His Holy Mother and the angelic hosts, and the noble army of martyrs and virgins, thou wilt live in His presence, and drink of the well-spring of His love forever, forever!" said Nemesius, whose countenance shone as if transfigured by the vision that filled his mind, and triumphed over the pain and outcry of nature.

She did not see his face—her head still rested against his shoulder, and her eyes still gazed out into the golden glow—but his words thrilled her heart with silent ecstasy, as love, winged by faith, bore her thoughts upward to a contemplation of the inexpressible joys he portrayed. Could it be that with her eyes, to which He had given sight, she would indeed behold the divine Christus, His

Virgin Mother, the holy angels, and all the resplendent hosts of heaven, and that He from His great throne would welcome a child like her? Would His Holy Mother, in her shining robes, and crowned with stars, lead her to Him,\* and say: "Behold, my Son, the child to whom Thou gavest sight, who has loved Thee, and not feared to die for Thee?" And then would He bless her, and let her kiss the hem of His garment, and place her where she could forever see His face?

"Is there no other way to Him except through death?" she presently asked.

"We only follow Him, my little one; for He trod the same dread road before us, that by His Passion and Cross His children may triumph over the sting and bitterness of death, and in His adorable presence find their eternal reward," said Nemesius.

"Then I will welcome death if it lead to Him. But thou, my father! what wilt thou do without thy little maid?" she asked, standing in her childish beauty before him, with the last rays of the sun tangled in the meshes of her golden hair, making her look already crowned.

"Do? Follow quickly. Our separation will be but for a moment," he answered, with a strange, glad smile.

Claudia nestled closer to him in full content,

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\* "And show unto us the blessed Fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

her innocent heart overflowing with thoughts of that Celestial City, whose light is not of the sun, but of the Lamb who dwelleth in the midst thereof—thoughts that spanned like a rainbow the dark, cloud-veiled stream, whose bitter, soundless waters flow between it and this mortal life.

At this moment a clear, sweet voice floated like an echo through the silence, rising and falling in sweet inflections, coming nearer and nearer, until the words it chanted became distinguishable.

"Our soul hath been delivered," it sang, "as a sparrow, out of the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken, and we are delivered." \* Then, the singer passing on, his voice drifted into indistinctness and silence.

It was Admetus, going from his work among the flower-beds. It was his way to refresh his soul by singing scraps of the sacred songs he heard at the functions in the chapels of the Catacombs. Like a bird, he could not help singing: it was the voice of his heart, full to overflowing with the joyful mysteries of faith.

"That will be our song by and by, my little maid," said Nemesis, laying his hand upon her head, thankful that she was prepared for the hour of trial, and assured that her brave child-heart would not lose courage in its ordeal of

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\* Psalm cxxiii., 7.

pain; but even he could not fathom the depths of its Christ-given love and faith, and he prayed God to send His angel to strengthen and comfort her when the time came.

Day had melted into purple twilight, through which the great, tremulous stars softly glowed; nightingales fluted their lays to the silvery chimes of the fountains, and from the pines on the hill, and the orange blossoms and sweet olives in the garden, the wind brought spicy odors to embalm the night. Nemesius and his child; their minds filled with thoughts too sweet and solemn for speech, walked silently back to the villa. After supper, loving words were exchanged and farewells spoken; then, blessing her with fervor, he hastened back to Rome, to bear the Holy Viaticum to certain Christians condemned to die on the morrow; to distribute alms to some newcomers, who had taken refuge in the Catacombs and were without food, and be ready to serve the Pontiff at the altar in the morning. Symphronius had instructions how to warn him, should danger threaten in his absence.

When Nemesius left the Mamertine, the night was far advanced, and darkened by clouds which threatened a storm. Threading his way in the gloom through narrow cross streets to shorten the distance, he was conscious that he was being followed. Several times recently he had imagined that he heard footsteps behind him, but, thinking it might have been accidental, gave no atten-

tion to it; there was no mistake now, however, and, wheeling suddenly around, he confronted a man wrapped in a cloak, so dark that he was scarcely discernible in the surrounding gloom. His movement was so quick and unexpected, that the fellow had no time to fall back, and almost ran against him.

"For what purpose dost thou follow me, friend? Dost thou need help?" said Nemesisus, in grave, kind tones.

"Aye, illustrious signor," stammered the other, "I heard thou wert merciful to the needy; but I was ashamed to beg, and followed, hoping—"

"To attract my attention? I will ask thee no questions; take this," said Nemesisus, dropping some silver coins into his hand; "and if thou art sore pressed again, come to me openly."

The man's dark, slender fingers closed over the silver, and with muttered thanks he turned away. "I must be more wary," he panted, as he ran through the darkness. "I could have stabbed him, but that would be going beyond my instructions, to say nothing of losing the reward I am promised, and perhaps my head." It was the Cypriot.

Again and again after this, Nemesisus fancied he heard stealthy footsteps near him when going on his errands of mercy at night to various parts of the city; often he *felt* a presence of some one unseen—by that keen sense, call it magnetism or

what you will, by which some organizations can feel even a passing shadow—but there was nothing visible whenever he turned, and he thought it might be the echo of his own footsteps.

In the mean time Fabian sought by every means to divert his mind from the apprehensions that tormented him, and look again only on the sunny side of life, but without success; for haunting forebodings attended him still, filling him with an unrest as uncontrollable as it was sad. His heart drew him to the villa on the Aventine with an impulse he found it difficult to resist; but he had not courage to go until he should become more accustomed to the changed state of affairs there.

One evening he went to the imperial palace. The soft strains of double flutes and stringed instruments blended with the hum of conversation and a light ripple of laughter, as the gay, pleasure-seeking guests, clad in festal attire and sparkling with jewels, moved through the splendid and luxuriously-appointed rooms. Stopped often to exchange salutations and a few words with acquaintances and friends of both sexes, Fabian's progress was slow towards the magnificent apartment in which the Emperor and his court held state on occasions of this sort. At length he was near enough to see Laodice—conspicuous as usual by the splendor of her dress and jewels, and the pre-eminence of her beauty—receiving like a queen the adulation and flat-



teries of the groups around her; she saw him at the same instant, and with a glance of her superb eyes invited him to her. She was in a gay mood, and glad to see the only man in Rome whose wit was worth a tilt with her own; she also had a purpose, known but to herself, which made his presence especially opportune and welcome.

After the first greeting and interchange of pleasant words, flavored with satirical but polite banter, the group of gay adorers, who had been offering so sedulously the incense of their homage to her charms, with ready tact withdrew, to avoid being cast into the shade by this more brilliant aspirant for her favor, giving Laodice the opportunity she coveted.

"Canst thou give me news of the beautiful blind child at the villa on the Aventine?" she asked in soft tones, waving her peacock fan gracefully to and fro with indolent motion.

"Claudia! she is quite well; I saw her the day after my return from Umbria. She grows more lovely every day," answered Fabian, startled by her question; for none, except her slave, the Cypriot, knew this woman better than himself.

"Can it be true that her blindness is cured, or is the report to that effect but one of those rumors one is always hearing in Rome?" she asked.

"It is true," said Fabian, having quickly recovered his self-possession and ready tact. "She

can see out of a pair of eyes almost as bright and beautiful as thine."

"He must be a most skilful physician who cured her," she rejoined.

"Yes, the fellow is skilful; he cured me of a dreadful fever I got on a troop-ship once in my travels, and I recommended him to Nemesisius. He brings his skill from the East, where he lived many years; he also studied in the schools of Egypt. He is a strange, mysterious man, who comes and goes like a ghost. It all happened while I was away in Umbria."

There was a baffled look in Laodice's eyes at this simple, straightforward statement. "What if, after all," she thought, "the Cypriot has deceived me!"

At this moment there occurred an unexpected interruption. The Emperor, having taken a fancy to seek amusement among the guests, espied Fabian, and shouted to him in his usual strident, rumbling voice. Instantly turning, Fabian made graceful obeisance, and stood waiting his pleasure.

"Health to thee, since thou art still alive, which thy long absence inclined me to doubt! Canst tell me aught of thy Achates, our commander of the Imperial Legion?"

"I have been absent from Rome, Imperator, and have seen Nemesisius but once since my return. He is looking into his private affairs, I learn," said Fabian, with as indifferent an air as

he could assume. "Truly," he thought, "Fate seems pressing close."

"Aha! by Mars!" cried Valerian, with a coarse laugh, "is that all? Can it be thou hast not seen the fair one of his choice, or heard of his soft dalliance, or the second nuptials? By the *Bona Dea!* she who has won Nemesius must be a paragon."

Fabian did not know that this was the inference Valerian had drawn from the esoteric expressions of Nemesius in their last interview, but he was not thrown off his guard; he only said:

"Nemesius rarely talks of what is in his heart; it is his sanctuary, and all it holds is sacred to him."

"A confidential matter, I see; but why such secrecy, unless to make the revelation more splendid by contrast? Commend me to the silent for surprises," rumbled Valerian, from his short, fat throat. "Nemesius has his hands full; for, besides his romance, and looking into the affairs of his large estates, he blends duty with pleasure by visiting the prisons occasionally, at my request; to see that those wicked dealers in magic, and conspirators against the State, ycleped Christians, have their deserts." A scowl of hatred drew the tyrant's heavy brows together, and his visage grew purple at the very thought of them.

Laodice had stood, in all her superb beauty,

silently watching Fabian's countenance, unobserved, as she imagined, in the hope of detecting some subtle, fitting expression, by which she might judge of the truth or falsity of his words; but it was inscrutable. He was on his guard, knowing that her eyes were upon him; and now, as he turned towards her, he observed a strange glitter, like a spark of fire, scintillating in their depths, which boded no good—an idea confirmed by her words.

"It will please thee, Imperator, to learn that the beautiful child Claudia, is cured of her blindness," she said, in honeyed tones to the Emperor.

"The little maid of the Aventine—the child of Nemesius! By Apollo! such news is like the jewel in a toad's forehead, in times like these. Health to the little beauty! But tell us by what skill or magic the extraordinary cure was made?" he asked, with singular interest.

"Fabian says by the skill of a famous Eastern physician," rejoined Laodice.

"He must possess the skill of Machaon himself, to give sight to one born blind. Is the report true?" inquired the Emperor, turning to Fabian for confirmation.

"It is indeed true, Imperator, to the joy of all who love her," he answered, feeling himself on dangerous ground.

"The pretty one is favored by the gods to be in such luck. I remember her as beautiful as Psyche. But I would hear more of the wonder-

worker, astrologer, magician, or what, who cured her. By Fidius! if he can give sight to one born blind, he must be able to bring the dead to life," said Valerian.

"Some go so far as to claim that he can, but there is a margin in all reports for exaggeration," was the quiet reply.

"Where is he to be found? I'll give him his own price, however high he may rate his services, to go with me when we march against Sapor."

"I can not tell, imperial sir. He was on his way to the East when he saw the child. He may return soon, for he comes and goes like a shadow. He cured me of a deadly fever, once on my way from Cyprus, and looks in upon me whenever he passes through Rome. Should he appear again before the army moves, I will apprise thee."

"Thou wilt earn my gratitude by so doing," answered the rumbling, imperial voice, as the General of the Prætorian Guard approached,—one whose claim to attention no Roman Emperor could afford to slight. Fabian almost drew a sigh of relief as the burly form of Valerian moved away. But he was not quite through the narrow strait in which, so far, he had skilfully avoided both Scylla and Charybdis.

Laodice, however, determined to probe the affair further.

"The Eastern physician is as great a thau-

maturgist as the famous Nazarene," she said, with a sneer lurking under her soft smile, and a deep meaning in her eyes and voice.

"So it is thought by some," was Fabian's tranquil answer; "but to me it is a one-sided proposition, as I am acquainted with only one of the parties."

Then, with his most delusive and irresistible smile, and that deferential, delicate manner which takes captive womankind in all ages, he added: "I can speak only of such spells as I know, beautiful sorceress, with anything like certainty. Let me ask, in turn, the fate of thy latest conquest, the young Syrian prince."

Laodice was too vain a woman not to fall into the trap, and yielded herself unresistingly to Fabian's elegant, subtle flatteries; and in the war of wit and repartee that thereafter ensued between them, she gave herself up to the fascination of the hour, knowing that she could bide her time for the gratification of her revenge.

But under it all the thought of the peril impending over Nemesis and his child was like a thorn in Fabian's heart; no protean mask that he might assume could disguise the painful fact from himself. And no sooner had he left Laodice, wearing his usual smile, speaking gay, sharp, witty words to those of his acquaintances he met on his way out, and found himself alone with the night, than a stern expression of dread and sorrow clouded his face, and he drew the

hood of his light cloak low over it, so that neither friend nor foe might observe him too closely as he passed homeward.

"How did Laodice discover that Claudia is no longer blind?" he asked himself as he hastened along; "and how far does her knowledge of the event extend? Have I baffled her by my evasions and transposition of facts?" He could not tell; he only knew that she was as artful as Circe, and was convinced that some fresh disappointment to her hopes had risen to kindle her hatred against Nemesis and his innocent child, and that her revenge would follow them to the bitter end.

Fabian sought his couch as usual, but the tumult of his thoughts forbade sleep. Once, towards day-dawn, he lost himself; but a vivid, frightful dream, in which he found himself struggling to release Nemesis and Claudia from the deadly coils of a python with a beautiful human face, which was wrapping itself closer and tighter around them, aroused him, and with the horror of the dream upon him, he sprang to the floor, every sinew strained by the desperate contest, and his face covered with a cold sweat.

Such a dream was not unnatural in the overstrained condition of his mind and nerves; but he would not court sleep again, if such horrible visions lay in wait for him beyond its portals. He lighted his lamp, looked at the clepsydra, took up a volume of the Satires of Juvenal, and

found in their bitterness a mental tonic, which, although refreshing, failed to bring forgetfulness of the vague unrest that haunted him.

After the light morning repast, Fabian resolved to drive to the villa on the Aventine; he was uncertain what he should find there, but concluded that to know even the worst would be better than this incubus of dread brooding continually over him. As he passed through the great bronze gates, and up the broad avenue, where every leaf and blade of grass held its glistening dew-gem—where the birds sang, and the sweetness of flowers pervaded the radiant atmosphere, he almost imagined that his old fever had been playing tricks with his brain, filling it with illusions, and that he was just awake.

Slaves ran to lead his chariot away as soon as he alighted. Standing a moment, he cast a glance over the beautiful grounds, and almost the first object that attracted his eye was Claudia, on a marble bench, under the great trees, her gazelle frisking near her, while some of her little pensioners, now grown strong and active, were riding Grillo by turns. Zilla sat apart, her pale face bent over a piece of rich embroidery, into which she was working threads of gold. And the sunshine through the leaves fell like a spray of gold over them all.

Claudia rose and half advanced to meet Fabian as he approached, waving his hand with a graceful gesture of salutation; then she stopped, while



a delicate glow overspread her face, for to her eyes he was still only a noble-looking stranger, from whose presence she shrank with instinctive and modest reserve, until he greeted her in the old familiar voice of her blind days; then she smiled and welcomed him.

"I salute thee, fairest! Methought Aurora had chosen to disport herself among the flowers, to receive the homage of fauns and naiads; while Zilla—health to thee, Zilla!—like the pale moon, hovered near," he said, gaily; for so far from these peaceful, lovely scenes appeared all thought of violence and danger, that he resolutely turned his back on the latter, and his face to the sunshine, temporary though it might prove to be.

Claudia smiled at his nonsense, and he thought he could never tire of the sweet, pure outlook of her radiant eyes.

"I have been wishing to see thee, oh! so much, Fabian! I have a keepsake for thee. Wait here until I run and bring it," she said.

"Let me go for it, dear one!" exclaimed Zilla, rising.

"No! no! do thou rest here—I will be back in a moment," she answered over her shoulder, as she sped away across the grassy, flower-dappled expanse that stretched between them and the villa. In a few moments she appeared, running towards them, her golden hair flying in the wind, her face bright and glowing, her hands clasping a small package.

"Wilt thou come with me to the cascade, Fabian? It is a long time since we were there," she said; then to Zilla with a caress: "Thou wilt care for the little ones while I am away?"

And they walked away together, the gazelle, which would not be left behind, followed close by the side of its gentle mistress, content to feel her soft hand upon its head, and occasionally rub its nose in her rosy palm.

Fabian involuntarily paused a moment at the Fountain of Diana, arrested by the view of the magnificent city outspread far below; its fanes, palaces, columns, and triumphal arches, draped as with tissues of gold by the Roman sunshine, which was so intensely bright that the shadows of their graceful projections lay blue along the flawless marble. He could even distinguish, by its sharper gleam, the great gold statue of Jupiter that surmounted the temple erected in his honor. A throb of pride dilated his Roman heart as his eyes swept over the glorious spectacle, and he could but exult over its pre-eminence as the queen of the nations. But far different were Claudia's thoughts; for it reminded her of that Celestial City, with gates of jasper and pearl, the light of which is He that was slain, the splendor of His Father, the Son of Mary, the joy of angels! The ecstatic reflection filled her heart and irradiated her countenance. Fabian caught its gleam as he turned away.

"Aha!" he exclaimed, well pleased, "thou

art a true Roman; yet how could it be otherwise, with the blood of a Cæsar in thy veins?"

He judged her by himself, nor dreamed that it was the thought of a "city not made with hands," that, like a lamp in a vase of alabaster, shone out from her glad soul, and illumined her fair countenance with heavenly graces.

Through the rose-blooms and orange flowers, under the palms, and along broad walks shaded by lime and sweet olive trees—through alleys where the white jasmine trailed its snow-white stars, filling the air with sweetness, they found their way to the cascade, which sprang flashing and sparkling from the rocks above. A grape-vine trailed from a crevice in the rock, where it had taken root, and with wanton grace flung red, ripening clusters to the sun, out of reach of all except birds and bees. Claudia held her hand in the crystal water; the gazelle lapped it daintily as it trickled over the marge of the basin; and Fabian, delighted in every fibre of his æsthetic nature by the exquisite picture, stood watching the child. There was that in her which puzzled him—a strange womanliness, without loss of her old, sweet, childish simplicity; an air of absolute happiness tempered by a soft seriousness, which cast no shadow over eye or lip. The pagan mind of him could not read it.

Drying her hands on the moss, she seated herself on a low grassy bank, overgrown with vetches, in front of the rustic stone bench on

which Fabian, at a sign from her, flung himself with an indolent air. The sunshine and leaf-shadows flickered and danced over them. Claudia's package, on which her hand lightly rested, lay beside her, and the soft-eyed gazelle crouched at her feet.

"And now, my Psyche, I am at thy bidding, whether to slay a python or go in search of a pigmy to add to thy family of pets," he said, in his old gay tones.

"No, oh! no!" she answered, with a little laugh; "it is nothing like that. I have something to say which no one else must know—yet."

He grew instantly intent, and a vague dread chilled his veins, as, fixing her grave, sweet eyes on his, she began:

"Fabian, I am going away soon—"

"Mercury speed thy journey, sweet one!" he interrupted, as a wild hope sprang up in his heart that Nemesis had, on second thought, changed his mind and would fly with her to a place of safety. "When wilt thou start? Tell me, that I may not be left behind."

"Oh! what joy it would be to have thee with us! But it is different from what is in thy thoughts, Fabian. I will tell thee. There are cruel men who kill all who will not deny and curse the divine Christ. They may come for us—my father and me—at any hour of the day or night, as soon as they find out that we are

Christians; but not all they can do would make me deny Him who suffered death for me. I would be glad to suffer and die for the love of Him. And, O Fabian! is it not joyous to know that we—my father and I—shall not be separated? Wilt thou come with us now?" she asked, holding out her hand.

"I might go on a worse journey, little one; but the conditions are impossible; for how can I deny that which I never affirmed? The Christus is nothing to me. It is possible to be happy under the mild sway of the gods, but it is like a reign of the Furies under thy Christus," said Fabian, his grief more bitter than his scorn.

"There are no gods, Fabian; those we worshipped as gods are devils. There is only One Supreme God, who made all creatures. The gods can neither give nor restore life; they could not give sight to my blind eyes; but He in one instant opened my eyes, and gave faith to my soul, that I might believe His word, and have eternal life," she said, her voice exultant and sweet.

"Thy logic is weak, my little dialectician," he replied.

"I do not understand words of the learned, Fabian; but I do know what it means to be a Christian, which I am, come life or death," she said, clasping her hands, and raising her eyes towards heaven, with an expression so holy and radiant that he remembered it to his dying day.

then, "I will ask *Advocata nostra* to intercede for thee, Fabian, and lead thee to Her divine Son; and, if I may, when I go to Them I will rest not from praying that thou wilt at last come."

He loved the little maid too tenderly to say words out of his pain that would distress her, or ruffle the exaltation of her enthusiasm, *dementia*, or whatever it might be; she called it faith, but it was faith of a quality he could not comprehend because its *animus* was far beyond the level of human philosophy, and exalted her—a simple child—above its widest scope. He was inclined to believe that the accursed *Chimæra* had woven spells around both father and child, to their own undoing. He remained silent; he wished to get away from the subject, and lapse once more into transient pretence of forgetfulness of the grim realities, only veiled maybe by a day, or perchance an hour.

Just then a great, rose-colored butterfly fanned Fabian's hair, and fluttered down against his cheek, made fearless by his perfect repose and silence. He lifted his hand and caught it by the tips of its wings, then offered it to Claudia; in another moment the beautiful, frightened captive trembled on her palm, where it slowly waved its wings once or twice, to assure itself that it was indeed at liberty; she brushed them with a kiss, then tossed it into the air, and watched it drifting and quivering farther and farther, until it disappeared in the golden haze.

"Now I wait the reward of my patience; I am consumed with curiosity about the promised keepsake, all the more because no one has ever before valued me sufficiently to give me one," said Fabian, who had been watching her, almost fancying that Psyche herself had sent the butterfly to afford him an opportunity to change the conversation without abruptness.

"I had not forgotten," she said, gently; then untied, one by one, the silken cords that confined the package, which contained two parcels of unequal size, both sealed.

"This," she said, taking up the larger one, "is the music-bird that was given to me a *lustrum* ago, by that gentle old man who came to see if he could cure my eyes."

"The physician Ben-Asa," replied Fabian. "I remember."

"It had been the plaything of his own little girl, who was dead, and he said it had been in his family hundreds of years," she went on; "so I think it must have been very precious to him. I want it given back to him with my love and thanks, after I go away; and tell him, Fabian, I prized it very much, and took great pleasure in it."

"Is it not just possible, dear one, thou mayest be disappointed of thy expected journey. People often are, even when most certain of going," he observed, with a ring of impatience in his voice; for it seemed as if Fate with cruel insistence

hemmed him in, leaving him no escape from his pain; "but I promise, in either case, whatever thou wilt."

"Thou art always kind, Fabian. This," she said, giving him the smaller package, "is thy keepsake. It is a rich jewel, and entirely my own to do with as I please, and I have worn it. Do not open it until—I am no longer here. That is all, Fabian, except that I would thank thee for all thy love and kindness."

He bowed his head over the little band that presented the gift, and touched it with his lips, with a feeling of reverence such as he had never felt towards the gods; but he did not speak—this man, whose philosophy boasted itself of immunity from all disturbing emotions, who had believed happiness on earth possible, until now. His heart felt as heavy as lead, and had he opened his lips, all the bitterness of his sorrow would have found vent. He thrust the things she had given him into the bosom of his tunic, and walked away a short distance, when, having mastered his emotions, he plucked a tall, snow-white lily, and, going back, placed it in her hands, saying:

"Thy words have pained me, little one; but I take comfort in the fact that thou art no sibyl. I will treasure thy keepsake while I have breath, but one of thy golden curls would be more precious to me than jewels; for it would remind me, after thou art grown up, that thy beautiful childhood was not a dream."



"Thou shalt have thy choice of them all," she said, with a smile, as she ruffled her dainty, dimpled hand through them; "Zilla shall cut one for thee as soon as we get back."

"Let us hurry, then; the sun grows hot, and fever lurks in those soft winds now drifting to us over the Pontine marshes. We have loitered here too long," he added.

When they got back, expecting to find Zilla in the same place, she and the children, with Grillo, had disappeared; but the noble lady Camilla, had just arrived, and was stepping from her chariot. Claudia flew to greet her; and Fabian, after an interchange of salutations and pleasant words, went away without the golden tress, which not until a later day came into his possession.

That night, feeling that solitude best suited his present mood, he sat alone, trying to concentrate his attention on a favorite comedy, and find his usual enjoyment in its pungent, satirical wit; but the flavor was wanting; the zest was gone; even the rustle of the vellum on which it was written irritated him, and made him start. A voice that he recognized, and approaching footsteps, made him turn expectant towards the entrance of his cabinet; the curtain was drawn aside, and Nemesis was ushered in. Their hand-clasp was as warm, their greeting as sincere and friendly as ever, though distinguished by a gravity different from their former inter-

course; nor was the visit one for the purpose of social enjoyment, as Nemesius presently explained. He brought with him certain legal papers, drawn according to the strictest interpretation and formula of the Roman law, which he asked Fabian, in the name of their life-long friendship, to preserve until such time as the bequests therein indicated could be disposed of, first by the written, and later by his verbal instructions.

He went over them carefully, word by word, with Fabian, that in the future there should be no misunderstanding as to the conditions, which might cause the latter to think his friendship had been strained too far at a moment and under circumstances which greater deliberation would have made it impossible for him to accept. There was no fear of a mistake: it was all plain to him; and, though the situation was anomalous, he pledged himself to hold as his own, according to the written bequest, and as the heir of Nemesius, the old palace with all it contained, and the villa and estate on the Aventine, until such time as by the latter's verbal wish they could be safely transferred to the Christian Church, to be applied to her needs at the discretion of her reigning Pontiff.

The pagan gentleman made no difficulty about holding in trust a heritage for the Christians; he would have done more for the sake of the man he loved; but that was all that was required, but

not all that he afterwards, with splendid generosity and noble unselfishness, offered to do.

Nemesius had already liberated his numerous slaves, giving a provision to all, to enable them to tide over their first days of freedom, until they should find self-support; he had turned his gold and silver and jewels into the treasury of the persecuted church, for the use of the poor; and now, like an athlete divested of all that might impede his victory, he waited for the final combat. It had cost him nothing to give up his earthly possessions, but there was a something more precious than all yet to be offered before his sacrifice was perfect, which would strain every fibre of his being, and rend his nature with an anguish which no material implement of torture, however savage—which no death, however cruel, could inflict. But he knew in whom he trusted; he remembered Gethsemane, and that moment of supreme desolation on the Cross that crowned Christ's holy Passion. In Him he hoped, waiting His holy will, strong in faith, and willing to suffer all things in testimony thereof.

## CHAPTER XIX.

BY THE WAY OF THE CROSS THEY WIN THEIR  
PALMS.

"I HAVE come, dear child," said Camilla, as they entered the cool, shaded atrium, "to stay until the sun gets low; then thou wilt come with me to my old villa out near the Via Latina, where thy noble father and my husband Tertullus will meet us. The holy Pontiff has signified a wish to see thee. Wilt thou come?"

"Oh, joyfully! I have thought constantly of the holy man, and that wonderful day that seemed to be the first day of my life. And his face was the first I saw when my eyes were opened. Thou art very kind, dear lady, to a foolish child," said Claudia, kissing the hand she held.

To kneel once more at the holy Pontiff's feet and feel his benediction, like a perfumed flame, penetrating her heart, while it glowed and sang its new song to Him whose name was graven upon it, and to know that her father would be there to share her happiness, was almost too much; only the language of Heaven could voice her felicity; and, although she made no attempt to give it expression, it irradiated her counte-

nance, scintillated in her eyes, smiled upon her lips, and crowned her altogether with a strange, spiritualized loveliness, of which she was as unconscious as is a flower when the glory of the sunshine rests upon it.

"I thought it would make thee glad," said the noble matron, noting the celestial expression of her countenance, while she thought: "How near the highest wisdom is the foolishness of a pure and innocent soul!"

Two of the household slaves now entered, each bearing a tray, one of which held crystal cups of snow-cooled orange juice, light, sweet cakes, great golden pears, and clusters of white and purple grapes; on the other were brodered napkins of fine Egyptian linen, two small gold basins containing perfumed water, and garlands of summer lilies and Damascus roses. After arranging the refreshments on a malachite table, whose green, highly-polished surface gave beautiful effect to the viands, they withdrew; and Claudia, always a gracious hostess, invited her friend to the light repast, which the summer heat made especially grateful.

Camilla had arisen at an early hour that morning, to assist at the divine Sacrifice of the Altar in the palace of a friend who was a recent convert to Christianity—a widow, whose two half-grown daughters received baptism at the same time as herself. She gave secret shelter to a priest, and one or two converts of the patrician

class, on whom the authorities determined to take signal vengeance as soon as they could be hunted down. Many of the ancient palaces of Rome had been constructed with concealed places of refuge within their walls, to which their inmates could fly for safety in times of invasion and violence. This and one or two others like it had become not only hiding-places for the persecuted priests, but sanctuaries where the mystery of the Holy Eucharist was often celebrated.

When the Divine Sacrifice was finished, and each devout soul had received the Bread of Eternal Life, and offered fervent thanksgiving for the mystic feast, the little congregation silently rose to depart. In the corridor Camilla spoke to Nemesius, who had been present. She warned him that there were whispered rumors afloat—none could tell whence they came—that his child had been cured of her blindness by the Pontiff Stephen, and that suspicion and surmise were rife. Some declared that a famous Eastern physician had given her sight, but others preferred the more sensational side of the story—that it was by the sorceries of the Christian Pope, who was well known to be a magician, that her blindness was cured.

“Discovery is inevitable. I do not seek it, and will not evade it. My will is the holy will of God. I have prepared my little one for that which is in prospect, and she is willing to suffer for Christ. Nature has given her a brave heart;

divine grace will give her strength and constancy in the hour of trial. She knows the voice of her true Shepherd, who will deliver His lamb from the fangs of the wolves seeking to devour her; and He will bear her in His arms to His own heavenly pastures," answered Nemesis, as if communing with himself.

Camilla's eyes filled with tears. "I am going to her this morning," she said. "The holy Pontiff has asked to see her, and, with thy consent, I will take her with me to my villa, where we will spend the night. Tertullus will be there, and, if it be possible, wilt thou not join us? In the morning our Holy Father offers the Divine Sacrifice in the old tower-chapel."

"It is my turn to serve him at the altar. I will be with you this evening. Tell my little maid to expect me," he answered, and they parted.

And so Camilla had come on her loving errand to the villa on the Aventine, the explanation of which brings herself and Claudia to the end of their light repast. Rising from the table, the little hostess led her friend up to the beautiful summer room where she was born, and in which her fair young mother had died, since which sad event no changes had been made in it, except to remove a shrine on which had stood a statue of some deity, to which formerly divine honors had been daily offered, and certain images of the *Penates* that had for many years looked down

from their pedestals with stony smiles of promise, which they were powerless to fulfil. In their places, carved in alabaster by a young Christian sculptor in the Catacombs, were small statues of Christ the Good Shepherd, the Virgin Mother and Her divine Babe, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, who had suffered martyrdom in Rome, and others who had given glorious testimony, even unto death, for their Faith.

Here, sitting together, Camilla and her young neophyte held long, sweet converse, and the noble Christian matron discovered, as the latter laid her heart bare to her, that her dispositions were singularly perfect; that her faith, love, simplicity of mind, and directness of purpose were in advance of the brief period of her Christian life, and were supernaturally combined with an utter, childlike humility which pervaded all. They talked much of the bitter ordeal by which the martyrs won their palms, but Claudia was presently silent, then at last she gave expression to her feelings.

"Their terrible sufferings do not last long," she said, "and when all is over they fly like doves to the dear Christus; then their joy begins, never to end. The wicked ones may frighten me by their violence when they take me away to kill me, and I may cry out with pain, for I am only a child; but my tongue shall never deny Him, and my soul, that came from Him, shall cling to Him and praise Him until my flesh and



my body are torn to pieces; then He will bring me alive out of their hands, to dwell with Him forever and forever."

Camilla now explained to her more fully than she had yet done the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, having several times before only approached the august subject; she told her that Jesus Christ Himself was really present in the divine Sacrifice of the Altar, and that His faithful ones received Him whole and entire from the hands of the priest, in the Holy Communion, as their Food and their Guest, to strengthen and sustain them in life, and as their Viaticum in death, to defend, console, and give them safe passage from time to eternity.

"Oh! tell me how soon I may receive Him into my heart!" she besought.

"It is not usual, dear child, for one so young as thyself to be admitted to this great mystery; but our Holy Father Stephen will judge. I think I may give thee hope," answered Camilla, feeling almost sure that an exception would be made in favor of this child of many graces, over whose head the sword of martyrdom hung suspended; for it was one of those unusual cases in which years do not count.

The day passed happily and swiftly, heaven had seemed so near, and at sunset Camilla, accompanied by Claudia, drove out of the city gates, along the flowery stretches of the Agro Romano, where all the beauty of the peaceful,

smiling scene, touched with the flickering gold of the sunset, made eloquent protest against the inhuman cruelties by which mortals marred the divine harmony of nature.

Within an hour after their arrival at the old walled villa, Nemesus and Tertullus came, and, after brief but cordial greeting, they went together down into the Catacombs, to present themselves to the Pontiff, and receive from him certain instructions in relation to measures for a more extended distribution of aid to the needy, suffering Church.

Early on the following morning Claudia was summoned to the chapel of the ruined tower. Following her guide, she was ushered into the presence of the holy Bishop, who regarded with tender interest the graceful, innocent child, as with glad yet reverent steps she approached and knelt at his feet. Giving her his blessing, he questioned her, leading her by gentle steps from one point to another, until her pure heart, with all its faith, fervor and courage, lay open before him, and he discerned her spirit so clearly as to be assured that she might indeed receive the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, and that in her angelic heart Our Blessed Lord would find an abiding place in which it would delight Him to dwell. The Pontiff gave her holy absolution; for, although her life was without a stain of mortal sin, there were doubtless venial shadows, from which it would release and purify her.

Then he bade her go in peace; and her face beamed with joy and happiness when she joined her father and Camilla, and told them that she was invited to the wedding feast.

"It will be her Viaticum," thought Camilla, whose eyes were dim with tears; "but oh! supreme selfishness! oh, human weakness! ye shall not have power to make me for a moment wish to keep such a soul from heaven!"

Camilla had prepared the altar, draping it with precious embroideries of gold, not the cast-off finery of her worldly life, but new and costly fabrics, thinking nothing too rich or priceless for His temple-throne. She had brought forth her jewelled vases, and arranged them, filled with flowers, on each side of the tabernacle, and placed among them golden lamps, which contained perfumed oil, and gave a clear, brilliant light. And now the saintly Pontiff, in vestments of white, with silver-broidered cross upon the back, attended by his deacon, Nemesius, ascended the altar and celebrated the Divine Sacrifice with singular devotion, knowing that for all there present, including himself, this might be their last, and the Communion their Viaticum. The same thought was in every mind, and so with adoring faith, exalted love, and solemn joy, they received their Lord and the benediction of His ineffable presence. Their interview with their heavenly Guest was so full of fervor that in pouring forth the ointment of

their love upon Him, they forgot their needs and all they had meant to ask for; but He knew—He would remember, and they were satisfied.

When the moment of departure came, the Pontiff blessed them individually and with deep emotion. "Pray for me, my little Lucilla," he said, laying his hand on Claudia's golden head. "Let us remember each other, my children, in our prayers; pray for your old Bishop, that when proved his gold may not be found to be dross; and pray for the persecuted Church. As often as I celebrate the holy mysteries I will have ye in mind."

He was turning away, and they were about separating, when Claudia, with voice full of entreaty, asked him if she might come again.

"We will meet soon, my lamb," he answered, gently. The spirit of prophecy was on him; he knew what he knew, but held his peace.

That night two youths, wrapped in sober-hued togas, met in the shadow of a stately palace in the neighborhood of the Forum Trajano, evidently intent on some appointment. There was a fog, through which filtered a soft drizzle of rain; and while they stood conversing a moment, a low-voiced stranger drew near, and, having courteously saluted them, said that he had accidentally overheard them while standing under the arched door-way close by, where he had taken shelter from the rain, and judging by their words that they were Christians, he besought

them to guide him where he could be baptized and instructed, as that very day at the Temple of Mars he had witnessed a martyrdom which had opened his eyes to the truth.

Zealous but inexperienced, as well as credulous, the young men invited him to accompany them; they were only catechumens, they said, but would introduce him to a holy deacon, who would give him the instruction he desired. He expressed his thanks with proper humility and gratitude, and they proceeded on their way together.

Had they only known that this plausible wretch was a miserable apostate, how swiftly they would have avoided his companionship! But there was none to tell his brief, infamous history—how once, in a moment of excitement, and ungovernable curiosity to penetrate the secrets of a mysterious sect, to afterwards barter them for gold, he had declared himself a Christian and been baptized; but having been arrested soon after, with several of his new companions, and confronted with the rack and flame, had denied and cursed Christ as required, burnt incense to Jupiter, and accused his friends of having deluded him by their sorceries. He witnessed their sufferings, and, to prove himself a true servant of the gods, derided and jeered the holy martyrs until their souls passed to their eternal reward.

Having thus saved his worthless life, and

being without means to sustain it, averse to honest toil, and a stranger in Rome, he was without friends, without shelter, and perishing for food. At this crisis of his fate he was approached by the emissaries of a lady of rank who wished to hire him on conditions which she alone would impart; and they were not mistaken when they counted on his necessities for his abject and unqualified assent. He had no scruples; his price was protection and good pay; hence he betrayed no hesitation when he learned from the lips of the beautiful woman, to whom he blindly swore unconditional obedience, that he was to assassinate a certain profligate young patrician, whose love she had trifled with, encouraged, and rejected, and who out of revenge had threatened to blazon abroad a secret that involved her honor, which by some means he had possessed himself of. A few days later the body of the unfortunate youth was found under the deep arch of the main entrance to his own palace, with a single wound, so small that it scarcely left a mark, inflicted by a keen, slender weapon, which penetrated his heart through and through.\*

Do we recognize in these two partners in crime Laodice and the wily Cypriot, and at last understand the hold she had on him? For, although as guilty as himself, he well knew there would

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\* In mediæval times in Italy, the hired professional assassins were known as "Bravos."

be none to believe or defend him should a person of her wealth and consequence denounce him. As her slave, she protected and learned to confide in him; while he, as patient as he was wily, bided his time. Thus the tie that united these two in the bonds of iniquity is explained.

The true motive of the Cypriot in addressing the two catechumens was that he heard them speak of the noble Deacon Nemesius, whom they were going to meet, and he felt that his opportunity to win a rich reward, and release from Laodice's service—she had promised it—was at hand; for, could they be persuaded to let him accompany them, he would see with his own eyes, and be able at last to report something conclusive.

The youths now stopped before a narrow door in a wall which enclosed one of the palace gardens; a single low tap was responded to inside by the withdrawing of a bolt; the door was cautiously opened, and the three entered. Groping through long, dimly-lighted corridors, they joined the little assembly of catechumens, old and young, who at the invitation of Nemesius met in one of the lower apartments of his own palace at stated times, where he instructed them in the mysteries of the Christian faith.

He was now standing before his eager listeners, explaining, in simple, logical, fervent words, the Sacrament of holy Baptism, when his eyes met those of the new-comer, who involuntarily

shrunk before the dignity of his presence and the manly, spiritualized beauty of his countenance. But the thought that at last he had the noble Christian in his toils quickly restored the vile creature's self-control, and he stood with downcast eyes, listening to the words of divine truth with apparently the most humble and absorbed attention. The instruction closed with a fervent invocation to the Most Holy Trinity for the grace of enlightenment and perseverance, the *Pater Noster*, and a prayer to the *Virgo Mater Salvatoris, Advocata Nostra*.

The strange neophyte was then led forward and introduced to Nemesis, who welcomed him with Christian charity, asked no questions, but said a few words of encouragement, and invited him to come again; but this, it is needless to say, was his last appearance.

Laodice was sunk in the depths of a gloomy, retrospective mood, when the Cypriot, with his usual stealthy step, came into her presence to report his success. She had been thinking how deceitful and shallow was the sparkle of life, how swiftly it had vanished, and how worthless and bitter it had been made by the ruthless disappointment of her love for the only man towards whom she had felt a sentiment exalted enough—as she thought—to raise her to its own height. With an heredity of the cruel blood of Egypt, the crafty blood of Greece, and the hot blood of Italy mingling in her veins, is it a won-



der that her passionate pagan heart now hated as intensely as it had loved?

When she heard all that her slave had to report, and that revenge was at last in her power, a sudden thrill, as if a cold snake had suddenly glided down her back, almost arrested for a brief instant the functions of life—but it was only an instant—then followed reaction, with fiery impulses kindled at the altar of Nemesis; her face glowed, her eyes flashed, and, commending the vile Cypriot for his vigilance and faithfulness in her service, she gave him a purse of gold and dismissed him; for she would lose no time. Then, arraying herself with splendor that rivalled Esther's, when, glowing and superb in her dark, queenly beauty, she appeared, with a far different object, before King Assuerus, Laodice entered the Emperor's ante-chamber, asking audience with him, which he readily granted, hoping that she brought him some amusement.

It would be vain to attempt to depict Valerian's rage when he learned that Nemesisius had become a Christian—Nemesisius, the only man whom he had found incorruptible, in whom he had placed implicit trust, and for whom he felt such friendship as a nature like his was capable of. Laodice herself retreated precipitately from the diabolical tempest she had raised; and the Emperor's attendants, as well as many persons of rank who were awaiting audience, fled or con-

cealed themselves, lest in his maniacal fury he might slay them.

The moment he recovered possession of his reason, an order was issued for the arrest of "Nemesius, late commander of the Imperial Legion, now a traitor to Rome, and a defamer of the gods." Before noon the infamous accusation was placarded on every wall in Rome, causing a sensation from palace to camp, and wherever the noble commander was known. Swiftly the news penetrated the Catacombs, and reached the ears of the Pontiff Stephen, who dispatched messengers to summon Nemesius to his presence.

The holy deacon was found out on the Agro Romano, aiding and consoling the destitute families of several fever-stricken quarry workers. When informed of the edict for his arrest, he straightened himself to his full stature, looked heavenward for a moment with a grave, sweet smile, and an exultant light in his eyes, as if the glory of things unseen had shone upon them, then without a word returned to his ministrations of mercy. When he had done all that was possible for the relief of the suffering ones, he hastened away, and quickly reached the dilapidated wine-shop of Galeotto, in the cellar of which, it will be remembered, there was an entrance to the interminable galleries of the Catacombs. Happily, Admetus had gone with him to the huts of the quarrymen, bearing wine and food, and now accompanied him as his guide through those

tortuous, subterranean passages, with every winding of which he was familiar.

The Pontiff awaited him with anxiety, and was overjoyed when he appeared. The interview was affecting and consoling. "The time approaches for our deliverance from our prison-house of clay, to reign with Him who by His Passion and Death made us His heirs in the Kingdom of Heaven forever," said the holy man. "Thou art impatient for the final victory by the shedding of thy blood for the love of Him; but, Nemesis, He has set the supreme law of charity above all Christian virtues; therefore be patient, for His persecuted Church needs thy help, and in serving His Spouse thou wilt best serve Him. It is more glorious to be found working His will in holy obedience than to rush unbidden upon the sword. Show thyself no more in the streets of Rome by day; I can not yet spare my deacon. In the mean time the youth Admetus will be thy messenger."

The military habits of Nemesis had taught him the importance of obedience as an auxiliary to martial success, but he had never yet waited to be first attacked by the enemy; and it not only irked his heroic nature, but grieved him, by delaying the eternal and ineffable victory for which he sighed. Still, he submitted with docile spirit to the divine authority invested in the visible head of the Church, Christ's Vicar on earth, putting self and every human consideration entirely aside.

Camilla, being one of the ladies of the imperial household, heard almost as soon as it happened of the Emperor's discovery that Nemeseius was a Christian, and of his mad fury on the occasion. She lost not a moment, but was on her way to the villa on the Aventine before the order for his arrest was promulgated. Having reached it, she went straight to Symphronius, informed him of what had happened, then, in her usual energetic way, with his assistance, dispersed and placed in safe-keeping Claudia's orphaned pensioners, and had the sick and disabled adults removed to the sheep-farms and olive lands, that lay some distance farther back among the hills. Her precautions were well timed; for that very night the villa was surrounded by soldiers, whose orders were not to molest the daughter of Nemeseius, meaning her to be the decoy-bird that should lead the fond father, anxious and uncertain as to her safety, to his home by night, or through secret ways by day; and if eventually he were discovered, both were to be arrested.

"Thou wilt see him again, dear child; until then meet him at the foot of the Cross with Mary, our Advocate, who consoles and delivers all who suffer for the love of Her Son," said Camilla, when, having accomplished what prudence suggested, she had gone in to Claudia, to acquaint her, as gently as the cruel facts of the case admitted, with the cause of her visit, and try to sweeten the bitterness of her grief by the consolations of faith.

She drew in the weeping child tenderly to her bosom, but sought not to check her tears, for she surmised—and truly—that it was the pain of separation from her father that most grieved her, and that she longed only for his presence to suffer with him.

“Yes,” she answered, presently, making a brave effort to compose herself: “that is where *his* thoughts will be, and there, too, shall mine be—at His feet, with His Holy Mother. O Camilla! is it sinful to weep?”

“No, my little maid, not tears like thine. The divine Christus often wept; He was acquainted with all human sorrow; and it is His way to let affliction visit his dearest ones, that they may prove by their patience and resignation how much they love Him, how blindly they trust Him, knowing that His ways are the best. And, after all,” she said, as if answering some thought of her own, “there’s but a breath between this land of exile and heaven.”

The faith of this noble woman, sure and steadfast, ever rested on Christ as unwaveringly as an eagle’s eye upon the sun; He was her celestial Sun, in whose light she lived, moved, and had her being, fearless in whatever she undertook for His honor, and willing to suffer death for His glory—a brave, tender, heroic spirit.

Camilla remained until the little girl grew more tranquil—until her sorrow and its mist of tears were glorified by hope in the eternal

promises of Him on whom her innocent soul rested; then the lady left her, with great pity and love surging together in her heart for the human desolation that had, all at once, fallen upon the child. It is true that Zilla was there; but what had her poor, grieved, pagan heart to offer her idol, except endearments? what to give, except vigilance and devotion, and the hatred and revenge that inspired her towards those who had brought mourning and weeping into this beautiful and lately happy home? The woman was nearly mad with grief.

Days passed, and Nemesius had not yet been taken. The two Consuls, Quirinus and Maximus—on whom devolved the duty of his arrest, with the comfortable assurance that they should suffer in his stead in case they failed—strained every nerve, and were ceaseless in their vigilance and zeal to secure their object. And there was yet another—the wily Cypriot—who, unknown to them, and with greedy eyes on the reward offered by the prefect, was stealthily, patiently engaged in hunting down the noble Christian.

The spirits of the two cruel Consuls began to flag, and the ardor of their pursuit to be dampened, as time sped on and there was yet no sign of their victim; they almost believed the culprit had slipped away from Rome, else how could he have so long eluded their search? But Nemesius had not left Rome; he was in the Catacombs, ever engaged in ministrations of mercy,

and daily sent and received loving messages from his little daughter on the Aventine, by Admetus, who, as lithe as a lizard, and as active as a squirrel, had ways of slipping in and out of the extensive gardens in the most surprising manner, eluding the vigilance of the soldiers on guard day and night, who, if they heard a rustling in the trees overhead, thought it was the birds darting in and out; or a tremulous stir among the long grasses and undergrowth at night, thought it was a hare, the sound was so slight and passed so swiftly.

Cheered by hearing from her father, and the certainty that he was in a place of safety, Claudia's thoughts in her loneliness were drawn nearer and nearer to the Celestial Land; closer and closer did her innocent heart cling to the divine Christus and His Virgin Mother. There was such an atmosphere of purity around her, that, now and then, when a rough, half-barbarian soldier, from his covert of espial, caught a glimpse of her white-robed, graceful figure as she passed fearlessly through the garden-alleys to the places she loved, he would draw back with an involuntary movement of reverence until she went by.

But at last, when the soft September sun lay golden on the beautiful land—when on the slopes of the hills and over the undulating, flowery stretches of the Agro Romano were seen processions of peasants in holiday attire, bringing

Home the grapes from the vineyards to the vine-vats, with Bacchic songs and choral lays, accompanied by the music of double flutes, zithers, and pipes of reed, their wagons loaded with baskets, in which the great red and purple clusters of the delicious fruit of the vine were heaped up, covered with blossoms; while the sleek oxen, garlanded with scarlet poppies, vetches, and corn-flowers, moved lazily along—the end drew near, and the events that followed, given in the “Acts of the Martyrs” and by tradition, succeeded each other with such rapidity that we may not linger.

One gloomy, lowering night Nemesius had left his underground “City of Refuge” to carry aid and consolation to certain sick and destitute Christians, who were living in concealment in the cellar of a hovel in the old southern suburb of Rome. Having accomplished his charitable purpose, he was returning, his thoughts so absorbed by celestial meditation that he did not observe the direction he had taken, until a strong light suddenly glared athwart his eyes. Startled, he halted, looked around, and saw that he was at the Temple of Mars, where at that moment Quirinus and Maximus, with others, were offering their idolatrous and unholy worship to the marble statue of the god. His soul revolted at the imposture, which was an insult to the supreme and only true God. Single-handed he had no power to stay the impure rites; but, knowing the efficacy of faith and charity, he



knelt on the stone-flagged road, and, lifting up his heart in strong appeal, he besought Our Lord by the operation of the Holy Ghost to enlighten the minds of these idolaters, that they might know they were worshipping devils instead of divinities; and so bring them to a knowledge of the Faith as it is in Christ.

At this moment, while Nemesius is beseeching God's mercy on their benighted souls, the Consul Maximus, a cruel persecutor of the Christians, was possessed by the evil spirit, and suddenly cried out, in the hearing of all present: "The prayers of Nemesius are burning me!"

The Cypriot, who had been stealthily creeping behind Nemesius for some short distance, having accidentally caught sight of his majestic figure at a moment when, for a wonder, he was not thinking of him, and convinced when the light from the Temple shone out upon him that it was indeed he, ran in and informed the Consul Quirinus that Nemesius had fallen into his hands, and was outside invoking his Deity, and working Christian sorceries for their destruction. They rushed out to seize him, but had no sooner laid hands upon him, than Maximus gave forth a shriek such as lost souls in the depths of perdition may be supposed to utter, and, to the horror of all present, was lifted several feet in the air, then hurled down upon the stone pavement, dead.\* This swift judgment of God on the

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\* It is so related by the Rev. A. J. O'Reilly, D. D., in his "Victims of the Mamertine."

Hardened persecutor of His suffering Church was but one of many manifestations of His almighty vengeance on His enemies; but they did not impute them to Him, but to the sorceries and magic arts of the Christians.

Nemesius made no attempt to escape in the temporary panic and confusion caused by the terrible death of Maximus, but suffered himself to be bound and led away to the Mamertine, where he was cast into one of the lower dungeons. When his capture was reported to the Emperor, the latter cried out:

"Now shall the gods be avenged! Torture and death will be nothing to this man; we will reach him and rend him through his child, the pretty, dainty maid! Bring him before the tribunal in the morning, and if he refuse to sacrifice to Jupiter, give *her* in charge to the courtesan Lippa, and remand him to the Mamertine." Then he returned to his wine and feasting and his lewd pleasures.

Fabian had confidential agents in his pay employed to find out and report to him everything they might learn concerning Nemesius; and the morning after his arrest the first news he heard on leaving his bath was that the commander of the Imperial Legion had been taken and cast into the dungeons of the Mamertine. The sun was barely risen, but, ordering his horse, he dressed quickly, and, without breaking his fast, was soon galloping along the road to the Aventine.

The scene that greeted him when he reached the villa, although not entirely unexpected, verified his worst forebodings, and kindled in his breast a concentrated fire of rage and grief which for the moment held him speechless; for on the portico, surrounded by rough soldiers, who had been sent to bring her away, stood the beautiful child, attired in a dainty, silver-broidered tunic and white silken robe—she had expected Camilla to breakfast with her—her face like purest marble, her fine abundant hair falling in golden ripples over her shoulders. A clasp of pearls confined her tunic on the shoulder, and around her neck she wore the fine chain of gold to which was suspended the crystal medallion of the Virgin Mother, *Advocata Nostra*, that now lay close against her wildly-throbbing heart.

This was the first scene of violence Claudia's innocent eyes had ever beheld. Did she think, as she gave one frightened look at the stolid, coarse, merciless faces of the soldiers, of what Fabian had once said to her when she was blind—that“there are in the world human monsters and beings so frightful as to make one rather wish to have been born blind than to see them?” If she did, it was but a flash of memory; for her heart swiftly turned towards the divine Christus at the moment He was betrayed into the hands of His enemies, and she remembered her words to Camilla when she heard how they took Him away to crucify Him: “If I had been there, I

would have asked them to kill me, and spare Him;" and now she did not falter, but offered herself again to Him, although shrinking in all her nature from the cruel, brutal wretches in whose midst she stood. Zilla and Symphronius had pleaded and wept in vain for her release, but were driven away with curses and threats, and now from a distance watched through their fast-falling tears for the end, which they were powerless to avert.

The soldiers were preparing to lead their victim away, when Fabian, dismounting from his horse, pushed his way through them, and, reaching her side, took her hand and drew her to him.

"What does this mean?" he cried, his voice stern, his countenance frowning. "Lay not a touch upon her, ye base hounds! or there'll be but a short step between ye and hell."

They hesitated, for as soldiers they were accustomed to yield instant attention to the voice of authority; but their lieutenant, an old, grizzled veteran, commanded them to close in and obey orders.

"Whose orders?" demanded Fabian.

"The Emperor's. And who mayest thou be to gainsay them?" was the curt, angry reply.

"A friend of the Emperor's," was Fabian's quick response. As a Roman, well versed in the laws, he knew the weight of an imperial order, and the penalties attached to disobedience. "There is some mistake. Why should the Emperor order the arrest of a child like this?"

"She is a Christian," answered the lieutenant, with a grim laugh.

"Yes, Fabian, it is true: I am a Christian," outspoke the child, in clear, sweet tones.

"Oh! foolish lamb, to run thy head into the shambles!" he whispered, knowing but too well how helpless he was to save. "How wilt thou convey her hence?" he asked the officer.

"Our prisoners walk."

"What are thy instructions in this case?"

"We have none."

"Then it will not matter. Symphronius," he cried, "come hither, old man, and bring out thy dead lady's litter for her child. And here, ye fellows, I will give ye silver for a carouse when off guard to-night," he said, with a furious scorn, as he threw his purse among them.

The once elegant litter, its rick silken curtains now faded and dust-covered, its splendors of gilding and fine decorations mildewed and nibbled to tatters by mice, was brought forth, and, after arranging the cushions for her comfort, Fabian tenderly lifted Claudia in, leaned over and kissed her forehead, drew the curtains together, and moved away.

"If questioned," he said to the astonished soldiers, "as ye go through the city, answer that ye are conveying a noble Roman virgin to be sacrificed to the gods, and guarding her as Roman soldiers now guard innocence."

His sense of inability to rescue her from her

fate, stung and enraged him; he had done all he could, but how little! He mounted his horse, galloped down the broad, beautiful avenue, and out of the wide-open gates, careless whither the mettlesome animal bore him, so that it was away from Rome.

On the following day Nemeseius was led before the tribunal and questioned by the judge, the examination being attended by all the formalities usual on such occasions; for the iniquitous proceedings had to be draped with a semblance of legality, to subject the Roman laws to the despotic will of the reigning tyrant. Nemeseius' answers were firm, and worded with such simplicity that it was impossible to misunderstand them. He declared himself a Christian; he refused to sacrifice to the gods; he expressed his strong abhorrence of idolatry, and, when threatened, made answer that he coveted no higher blessing than to be permitted to seal his faith in Jesus Christ by the shedding of his blood.

"Despite thy wicked obstinacy, the Emperor is inclined to be merciful, Nemeseius, and will afford thee time for more reasonable thoughts before sentence is pronounced; meanwhile it may console thee to know to whose keeping he has confided thy daughter," said the judge, with a malignant sneer; but he held back the information that every effort was to be made by her new protector to corrupt the child's mind, and force her to worship the gods. "Wouldst thou see for thyself?"

"My daughter!—what of her?" exclaimed Nemesius, starting, as he glanced around.

"Go look from yonder open casement into the court below; she is there, unless they have removed her," responded the judge. "Make way for him, soldiers."

The soldiers moved back, and, attended by his guards, Nemesius quickly reached the window, and, on looking down, beheld a sight which nearly froze his blood. There, surrounded by soldiers, her soft, dimpled hand in the grip of a bold-faced, flaunting woman of remarkable size and stature, stood his little Claudia. They had not stripped off the pretty dress in which she had that morning arrayed herself to welcome Camilla; and, with the sunlight upon her golden hair and her spotless white attire, she looked like a fair lily in some savage morass, or, what is more true, a celestial spirit surrounded by demons. Nemesius heard the woman's loud, coarse laugh, as low, ribald jests were bandied between herself and the soldiers. And now, while his eyes rested horror-stricken on this scene, obeying some signal, they led her away, his innocent one—led her away, for what and with whom?

"What woman is that with the child?" he asked, almost suffocated with emotion.

"That," answered the soldier, with a grin, "is Lippa, the Cyprian; thou hast heard of her, mayhap?"

Aye, he had heard of her as a disturber of the peace, a betrayer of innocence, the most infamous woman in Rome, whose house was a resort of the vilest characters. Could it be that his pure child was to become the inmate of such a den, and under such tutelage as Lippa's? Could fiendish malignity go further? A storm of natural emotion surged through the strong, noble soul of Nemesius, almost rending his heart. Had they broken his body by slow tortures on the rack, torn his flesh with hot pincers, beaten him with spiked clubs—none of these could have equalled the inexpressible anguish caused by the sad condition of his child. He thought of the cruel treatment she would receive, the horrible suggestions she would be obliged to listen to; and might they not succeed by their devilish arts in corrupting her innocence? Oh, bitter cup for a man like this to drink! Oh, terrible assault of nature and hell to shake the integrity of his soul!

It was but a little while that the dark shadow eclipsed his spirit; and, although the pain was not removed, he, remembering in whom he trusted, offered her to Him, and implored the protection of His Virgin Mother for his innocent one. She had disappeared from his view; he turned away from the casement and faced his enemies, who waited with fiendish glee and curiosity to see and exult over the effects of their cruel and malicious work; but his grave, majestic countenance gave forth no sign of the passion of



pain that had torn his heart; his tongue, no word. His lips, perhaps more firmly set, and a gray pallor overspreading his face, were all that but faintly expressed his agony.

"Cruel parent!" cried the judge, as Nemesisius one more resumed the criminal's place on the *catasta*; "will thou not, even to rescue thy beautiful child from a fate like that which awaits her, cast a few grains of incense into the brazier?"

"She and I are in the hands of Him who created and redeemed us; He is strong to deliver her out of the jaws of the devouring wolves to whom ye have cast her, and to punish forever in hell those who would destroy His innocent one. Again I say, I will not burn incense to idols," answered Nemesisius, with such majesty and impressive determination that the judge fairly cowered; for it occurred to him that there had been many terrible examples of what the prayers of the Christians could bring down upon their persecutors; had not Nemesisius himself only yesterday killed Maximus, the consul, by his incantations?

"Her fate and thy own be upon thy head!" said the judge. "Soldiers, back with him to the Mamertine!"

In the solitude of his dungeon, Nemesisius prostrated himself on the rough, slimy floor, and, pouring out his tears, lifted up his heart with intense fervor and unshaken faith to God, and besought Him to deliver his child out of the

pit prepared for her destruction by the malice of idolaters. From the fetid depths of this place of sorrow, cleaving through its impervious walls, swiftly arose his prayers to Heaven, and soon was his resignation rewarded beyond all human conception.

We will follow Claudia as, full of fear, she was led by Lippa to her house. Making her way through the rabble—there was always a rough crowd hanging around her door—that pressed forward to stare and ask questions which she disdained to answer, and, without relaxing her grasp on the child's tender hand, she passed quickly through the vestibule into a room, where several men—wrestlers, gladiators, and a soldier or two off duty—were gathered around a table, noisily engaged in a game of *micare digitis*,\* their stake a bottle of wine. "*Tutti*" had just been shouted, and wild excitement prevailed; for there had been a fraudulent count of thumbs. Oaths, frantic gesticulations, a wild uproar of voices, and flashing knives, were the sounds and sights that greeted the innocent, sensitive child.

Lippa called to them to clear out, fearing the carouse would end in some one being murdered, and the reputation of her house be thereby ruined. They turned their heads at her voice,

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\* The oldest game of chance then known. It was brought from Egypt to Greece, thence to Italy, where, under the name of *Mora*, it is as popular now as then. Its name signifies flashing of the fingers.

and at once their attention was attracted by the beautiful, richly-dressed young girl clinging to her hand. One more daring than the others rushed towards her, but a well-aimed blow of Lippa's sinewy fist caught him between the eyes with such violence that he staggered backward. Claudia shrieked and clung to the woman, who had not delivered the blow in defence of the child, but because she feared that Guercino might wrench the jewel from her tunic, or the glittering chain from her neck, knowing what adroit thieves the men were who infested her drinking-rooms.

The depraved woman felt the child's arms clinging around her, the delicate, trembling form pressed against her, and it touched some far-off buried memory of the days of her own youth and innocence. But the reflection was transitory; it awoke no pity in her now callous heart towards the gentle little creature, to whom she spoke harshly, and shook off. Then, leading her into a small, gloomy room reeking with unsavory smells, she stripped off her beautiful garments, secreted the pearl clasp and gold chain in her own bosom, clothed her in the cast-off, dirty dress of a slave, then went away, fastening the door on the outside.

Finding herself alone at last, a stream of tears flowed from Claudia's eyes, sobs convulsed her breast, and the only ray of consolation she had was in calling upon the Holy Name of Him

who was enshrined in her pure heart. Was this suffering for Him? Then welcome. It was not death, but would He be well pleased if she bore it patiently for the love of Him? Then for His sake she would make no moan, and she offered herself to Him to suffer as He pleased; all she asked was His love, and grace to resist evil, and to be at last with Him. Happily she was ignorant of the nature of the perils that environed her, and a sweet composure stole over her. When at night some coarse crusts and a cup of water were brought to her, although nature turned from them in disgust, she tried to eat; and when later she was ordered to go into a close closet to sleep on a heap of rags and other refuse, she lay down in peace, knowing that the dear Christ was her refuge, and would watch while she slept. She thought of her father with tender affection, happy to know—as she imagined—that he was in safety in the Catacombs.

And so this lovely, sensitive child, who had been reared in softest luxury, and guarded from every word, sound or sight that could shock or sully her stainless innocence, was, for her faith in Christ, cast down into the very depths of human cruelty and depravity, where every effort the enemy of souls could suggest to his human instruments was to be put into operation to corrupt her, and force her to return to the worship of idols. But the language of depravity and lewdness was as incomprehensible to her as if

she had suddenly been transported to a distant and barbarous land, while many things she was compelled to look upon frightened and sickened her with instinctive disgust.

Day after day new trials beset the little heroine; she was required to burn incense before a statue of Hercules, the favorite deity of the house, and commanded to deny Christ; refusing to do so, she was beaten, and sent to work with the slaves. Nothing that could wound or fill her with horror was spared; Lippa often left her without food, but the brave little heart never faltered, and at last—as it is related—her heavenly patience, her sweetness and innocence, touched the savage natures of her persecutors, who began to feel ashamed of their depravity and cruelty.

There was one of Lippa's women, a coarse, handsome creature, who had at first been the harshest and most wicked of them all in her assaults on the brave Christian child, but who now, grown softer and kinder, spared and protected her whenever it was in her power to do so. Her name was Cypria, and day by day the influence of Claudia's example impressed her more deeply. One evening Cypria questioned her as to the name and rank of her father. It was the first time any one had spoken to her on the subject, and she answered readily, with tears in her eyes:

“My father is named Nemesius; he was the

commander of the Imperial Legion, but now he is a soldier of Christ."

"Oh! is it indeed so? Art thou the child of that brave officer who once saved me from Cecco's knife just as he was about to cut my throat?" cried the woman, falling at Claudia's feet, kissing and bathing them with her tears. "And now thou leadest me to a better life. I, too, will be a Christian. Teach me; forgive me!"

They were alone. Claudia lifted up the woman's wet face, kissed off her tears, and exclaimed, joyfully: "I will tell thee about the dear Christus, and He will lead thee, and His Virgin Mother will be thy Advocate."

"Oh! will They not spurn me for my wicked life? Oh! there is no evil that I have not done!" she cried.

"No: for such as thee, too, did He suffer death," she answered, in soft tones. "Oh! no, Cypria; He loves thee with everlasting love, and He will welcome thee to His fold. By and by, when my father comes to take me away from this dreadful place, thou shalt go with us to one who will give thee Holy Baptism, and instruct thee better than I can; for I am only a child."

Later Cypria told her that a pale woman, bowed with sorrow, came to the door every day, praying for tidings of her; but she was always driven away, and ordered not to come again; still on the morrow she was there at the same hour, asking the same sad questions, which were

answered only by gibes and insults and derisive laughter.

"I know that it is my nurse, Zilla, who has been a mother to me ever since I was born. O kind Cypria! see her, and give her my love; and tell her that I am well, and that no harm has befallen me; for the dear Christ has sent His angels to watch over and guard me," she said, her countenance irradiated with such a soft light that the woman turned to see whence it came.

Cypria promised, and kept her word; for it was, indeed, the broken-hearted Zilla.

The very next day Fabian was summoned to the Emperor's presence. He would have disregarded the mandate had it been possible; for his very soul revolted at the thought of him. He had a motive, however—although he was not hopeful as to its results—which induced him to obey, instead of going with all speed to Ostia, to embark on his galley and put out to sea, as he had at first resolved.

Valerian, on the other hand, having learned that there was ill feeling among the soldiery on account of the arrest of Nemesius, who was their idol, and the cruel fate of his lovely child, had grown uneasy, and resolved to manifest a desire to be merciful, which, if rejected by Nemesius, would throw upon his own head the responsibility of all that should follow.

Fabian was at once conducted to the Emperor, whom he found alone in his private cabinet.

After the usual salutations, the imperial tyrant, fixing his cruel eyes on Fabian's countenance as if he would read his very soul, said:

"It is needless for me to relate what has befallen Nemesius through his own perversity, as thou art doubtless informed."

"I know all," answered Fabian.

"Thou knowest that I confided in and honored Nemesius above all men, until he ungratefully betrayed both my friendship and trust, by giving himself up to the delusions of magic, and united himself with the enemies of the gods for the overthrow of religion and the destruction of the State—both capital offences," continued the Emperor, affecting a dignified and injured tone; "but, even so, I am disposed to be merciful, and to use every possible effort to recall him to his senses. Therefore, knowing thy life-long intimacy with him, it has occurred to me that, if thou wilt take the matter in hand, he may be induced to heed thy persuasions, and be sufficiently amenable to reason to recant his folly; in which case he will be restored to his military rank, to his child, and to the enjoyment of his possessions."

"It would be but time wasted, Imperator, for me to attempt such a thing; for, although Nemesius has, in my judgment, done a most foolish thing, and I have made use of every argument to dissuade him, he, being a man of great integrity and uprightness, and of a singularly



noble sincerity of mind, does only that which appears to him right solely on conviction; therefore it is right, in this case, for him to have acted just as he has," said Fabian, with gravity.

"What! right that he should become a Christian?" angrily cried the Emperor.

"Yes, right even to that extreme, from his point of view; and, such being the fact, and I having failed to convince him to the contrary, a fresh attempt on my part would be needless insult—it would be as vain," said Fabian, with a bitter laugh, "as the efforts of Enceladus, who with a mountain pressing upon him, throws rocks at the gods, which all fall short of their aim."

"Perhaps thou sharest his delusion?" cried Valerian, enraged; "if not, prove it by casting spices in yonder brazier before the statue of Mercury."

"A measure if thou wilt; not only here, but before every deity in Rome!" exclaimed Fabian, with suppressed fury, as he strode to the spot, and threw a handful of frankincense on the glowing coals, which instantly filled the room with a cloud of aromatic smoke, that was at the same time pungent and suffocating.

So fitful are the moods of tyrants that, although coughing violently, and nearly suffocated by the incense—which, being a religious prince, he always kept on hand for his private devotions, as well as for emergencies like the present—

Valerian laughed as soon as he recovered his breath; and, his good humor restored, he told Fabian that he had abundantly satisfied him of the sincerity of his fidelity to the gods. In the midst of the smoke Fabian wished he had been more prudent, fearing that he had marred the success of the object he had in view; but, reassured by Valerian's extraordinary mood, he thought the moment was propitious.

"Imperator," he said, "I wish, with thy gracious permission, to submit a proposition to thee."

"I am willing to serve thee, Fabian; name it."

"It is this. I offer to the treasury of the State one-half of my enormous wealth for the ransom of the child Claudia. I propose to adopt her as my own, and remove to Britannia Prima, where I have an estate."

"It is a generous offer—more than the spawn of a Christian is worth," replied the scowling tyrant. "It depends on Nemesius himself whether or not the ransom will be accepted; for if he persists in his madness, he shall suffer through her to the end."

"All, Imperator—all that I have, even my life, for both!" urged Fabian.

A hoarse, rumbling laugh was Valerian's answer to this noble offer. "By *Fidius*! it is equal to anything in the tragedies of Euripides; but remember, Fabian, that this is real life, not a stage."

"Such things were once realities in Rome," was the proud answer.

"Thou knowest the only conditions on which Nemesius and his daughter will be spared," returned the Emperor, rising. "I regret losing thy agreeable society; but, this being the hour I go to the Baths of Sallust, I must say farewell."

Fabian, on being thus abruptly dismissed, bowed and withdrew.

"The Cranes of Ibycus still fly, and will find thee at last, thou monster!" muttered Fabian, as he passed beyond the gilded leather curtain. His last hope destroyed, he returned dejectedly home and gave orders to be denied to all visitors.

At last a day came when Claudia was to leave the infamous abode of Lippa. That morning everything had gone wrong with the depraved creature, and her fiery temper spared nothing that came in her way. She saw Claudia working among the domestic slaves, called her, and ordered her to lift an article which it was beyond her strength to move, although in a spirit of sweet obedience she made an effort to do so. Lippa snatched up a scourge, and gave her a sharp cut across the shoulders; another lacerating blow was in the act of descending on the tender flesh, but was arrested by Cypria's running in breathless, to announce that the "Emperor or the Prefect, or somebody, had come to take Claudia away."

"I'm glad enough to dance!" exclaimed Lippa;

"she has kept me in a fever ever since she has been under my roof, so that I've not had a night's rest. Take her to the bath and put something clean on her before she goes. As for me, I'm going to gossip with my friend the barber, and then to the circus."

"Where am I going?" asked the weeping child in surprise.

"To meet thy father, little one—one of the soldiers told me. Come, let us hasten," said Cypria, leading her by the hand. "I have some of thy own pretty garments, brought by thy nurse, hidden away ready for thee."

When the lash had stung Claudia's tender flesh, and she had cried out with pain, she thought of the scourging of the divine Christ, and, though she wept bitter tears, in her heart she was glad to suffer a little as He did and for Him; and now, in union with this sorrow, she offered the joy that filled her at thought of meeting her father. Her golden hair once more fell in curls over her shoulders; refreshed by the bath, and some sweet salve with which Cypria anointed the crimson welt left by the scourge, and arrayed in her simple tunic and robe of white, embroidered with lilies, she looked a very image of purity and innocence. She thought not of the soldiers who guarded her, of the staring crowds, the rough stones of the street; for the celestial love that glowed in her heart, and the certainty that in a few moments she would be

in her father's arms, made her oblivious of all else.

Nemesius met his child near the Temple of the Earth, to which both were being conducted, and where the tribunal sat that would pronounce the final sentence. In a moment she was clinging around his neck, while he embraced her fondly, and, aware of what was impending, could scarcely command his emotion; but this she did not observe, in her joy at once more seeing him.

"Thou wilt keep me close, my father, and not let them take me back to Lippa. Oh! it is a terrible place!—I must have died but for the love of the dear Christus, who comforted me, and the protection of His Holy Mother. Oh! let them kill me, only save me from Lippa! But, my father, there is one even in that dreadful den who wants to be a Christian—a woman whose life thou didst save when a wicked man had his knife ready to cut her throat. She was good to me after she heard I was thy little maid. Her name is Cypria," said Claudia.

"Fear not, sweet one, thou wilt not return to Lippa. May God reward with His choicest graces her who was kind to thee!" he answered, knowing what was at hand. Her words tore his heart, and he "felt it a greater sacrifice to offer to God the impulses of revenge than the shedding of his own and his daughter's blood."\*

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\*The incidents now related of the martyrdom of Nemesius and his lovely child follow closely the account given by Dr. O'Reilly, gleaned by him from the "Acts of the Martyrs."

This offering, so pleasing to Almighty Love, was succeeded by an unspeakable joy that flooded his soul at the constancy of his brave Claudia, and, leading her by the hand, he went in, serene and undaunted, before the tribunal of Valerian. He had laid aside forever the glittering trappings of his martial rank, and appeared in the graver habiliments of a Christian, his military peace-toga thrown about him. He was in the prime of a noble manhood, perfect in masculine beauty, tall and stately, and bearing in his presence a natural dignity, which now, as it had always done, commanded involuntary respect and admiration. Among the many present were several of his comrades in arms, who were touched with profound sympathy when they beheld their brave commander and his innocent child conducted to the criminal's stand.

Valerian, wearing his imperial robes, and crowned with a wreath of sweet olive, sat, conspicuous and scowling, in his curule chair of ivory and gold, which was elevated on a dais several feet above the floor; soldiers, lictors, and priests of the idol to whom the Temple of the Earth was dedicated, surrounded him. The judge and other legal officials were in their places. Nemesius and his beautiful child stood on the *catasta* in view of every eye, and a breathless silence prevailed. Then spake the judge, with impressive solemnity:

“Nemesius, where is that prudence always so

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conspicuous in thee, whose public career has ever been so illustrious in word and deed? Dost thou not think that we know what is good for thee, and will recommend it? We counsel thee, therefore, not to abandon the worship of the gods thou hast followed from thy childhood."

The words of the judge were less than nothingness to Nemesius, who was contemplating the result of his refusal to sacrifice. Thought of the tender one clinging to him caused nature once more to assert itself, the exaltation of his spirit drooped, and unbidden tears rushed to his eyes;\* but, lifting his heart to Him who was sifting His servant like fine wheat, he composed his voice, and answered with firmness and dignity:

"Thy words of praise apply not to me, who have always been but a sinful man. I rejected the truth, preferring idolatry; I have shed innocent blood; and when burdened and crushed with guilt I found mercy at the hands of the great and only true Ruler, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Although late—my life having reached its meridian—I now know Him who redeemed me with His Blood, who gave sight to my child whom no earthly skill could cure, and at the same time illuminated also the eyes of our hearts, that, despising the blindness of idolatrous superstition, we might be converted to the light of Christianity. Him I fear, and Him only will I

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\* "Acts."

adore; to Him I offer the poor service of my worship. I reject idols of stone and metal, which I know to be devils, that seek our ruin, and wish to drag us with them to the woes of eternal death." \*

As he proceeded with his simple and glorious confession, Valerian's face grew livid with suppressed wrath, and he roared out in his rasping, guttural voice:

"I know the spell of thy magic words, and the power of thy incantations, which even slay whom thou wilt; for it was by them Maximus was slain, that thou mightest escape justice. It is plain, moreover, that it is thy purpose to try thy dark arts against me, thy lawful ruler, and the safety of the State. Thou deservest the severest penalties instituted for such crimes; but, willing to show mercy, sentence shall be delayed to offer thee another chance. Wilt thou sacrifice?"†

The reply of Nemesius was a stern, emphatic negative.

All through this trying scene, Claudia clung close to his arm, her pale face pressed against it, listening to his words, and whispering prayers to the divine Christus to deliver them out of the hands of the wicked, and bring them safely to the joys of His presence.

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\* The words of Nemesius.

† Valerian's words.



A deep silence pervaded the place—the supreme moment had come; then, surging and rumbling out upon the stillness, the voice of the malicious tyrant pronounced sentence: “They are to be taken hence to the Temple of Mars, on the Ap-pian Way; there the daughter of Nemesus shall be put to death before his eyes, unless, when seeing his child about to be executed, he consent to save her life and his own by abandoning his wicked delusion and sacrificing to the gods.”\*

Thus Valerian washed his hands of the blood of his victims by throwing the fatal responsibility on the head of Nemesus, sparing him the customary sufferings, to torture him more cruelly through his affections.

Their sentence having been pronounced, Nemesus and his little daughter were led away to the Temple of Mars. The scene that followed has lost none of its heroism and soul-touching pathos, nor been dimmed by the seventeen hundred years that have since passed, but thrills the hearts of those who read of it now, as if it had happened only yesterday.

The atrium of the Temple was thronged to witness the spectacle. Many were in tears at the sight of the beautiful, innocent little maid, whose purity shed a halo of sweetness around her. She trembled when her eyes fell on the rough soldier, with his gleaming axe, who stood

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\* As recorded in the Acts.

ready to slay her. It is not recorded what passed between her noble father and herself in their last embrace, but we can imagine that he bade her have courage, that her suffering would only be for a moment, and that He whom she loved and His Holy Mother were already waiting at the portals of the Celestial City to receive her; and that she would scarcely have won the diadem wherewith she would be crowned, and the palm they would place in her hands, before he too would be there, to be united with her forever. The end was so near that his courage, kindled by divine anticipation and undimmed faith, rose to a sublime height; with his own hands he cut off the golden curls that fell over her fair neck, that the axe might strike sure, and bound a handkerchief over her eyes; then, holding her soft hand in the firm, tender clasp of his own, led her to the executioner, and bade her repeat the Holy Name of Jesus.

The man, unnerved at the sight, hesitated to strike off the beautiful head; but, terrified by the rough command of his captain, he advanced with uplifted arm; there was a flash of steel, and the next moment it was crimsoned with innocent blood. Like a dove that had broken the fowler's snare, her angelic soul escaped, and she was already singing her glad song of praise with the celestial hosts.

Nemesius bent his neck to the axe, still dripping with the blood of his innocent one, and,

repeating the Holy Name aloud, so that all might hear—the Name that had lighted her way and strengthened her heart—he too passed to his eternal reward.

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That night Fabian, almost benumbed with grief, was alone in his private apartment, where he had been for some time waiting the appearance of a person he expected. By the *clepsydra* it was far past midnight. He heard a light foot-fall along the corridor, a rustle against the leather curtain that hung over the doorway, and the youth Admetus entered, bearing a small parcel which had been confided to him by an official at the Temple of Mars. Fabian, looking up, bade him speak his errand, which he did with fast-falling tears, his strangely beautiful face as white the while as a piece of rare Grecian sculpture.

Camilla had sent him to say that, with the connivance of certain Christian soldiers, helped by one of the Temple officials (to whom she had lavishly given a bribe), she had obtained the sacred remains of Nemesius and Claudia; and by his own wish, expressed some weeks before to the Pontiff Stephen, who in turn communicated it to her, they were to be entombed in the Catacombs, and were at that moment lying at her villa, near the Via Latina, in case Fabian should wish to visit them.

“Tell the Lady Camilla it is well. I leave

Rome at dawn. My coming would not restore life to the two I most loved, and I have not courage to look upon them dead; but I thank her in their name for her tender care," was Fabian's brief but pathetic answer.

Admetus delivered the parcel he had brought, and, drawing his cloak closer, departed as silently as he had come.

Fabian trimmed the wick of his lamp, and with trembling fingers undid the fastenings of the clumsily-folded package, and as the coarse napkin fell apart, he saw that it contained the golden curls of Claudia.\* The Temple official, who had promised to secure him one, gathered them up after Nemesius had cut them off, and preserved them until they could be conveyed to him. The little girl had promised him one—how well he remembered the day, and all that had passed between them!—and as the hair shone in beautiful coils and waves of gold in the lamp-light, and he thought of the cruel death she had just suffered, he bowed his face upon them, and wept aloud. When he lifted his head, his once smiling countenance was set in stern lines, as if nothing earthly could ever brighten it again, and every vestige of color had fled from it. The old Fabian was no more.

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\*Called in the Martyrology Lucilla, the name given her by the Pope Stephen in Baptism, when she received her eight. The Feast day of Nemesius and Lucilla falls October 31st.

He was going away at the first glimpse of dawn, but there were one or two things to be done before he could say a last farewell to the past. He opened an ivory cabinet, and took out the "keepsake" Claudia had given him, which he had not unwrapped; for she had bidden him not to look at it until after she had gone away. She was gone, and he would open it.

Unfastening the silken cords that had been tied by her own dainty fingers, he saw a small gem-studded casket in which lay glowing and flashing the ruby amulet, with the gold Etruscan chain coiled around it, which Laodice had given her that happy day they had spent at the ruined Temple of Jupiter on the Aventine. A strange, faint odor exhaled from it, and reminded him that there had been a mystery associated with it, which he would now penetrate.

No hint of this had reached Claudia's ear at the time the ornament was laid aside as unsuited for a child of her age, when she, knowing Fabian's passion for curious gems, had declared it should one day be his, and had with touching fidelity remembered her promise.

Selecting a finely-tempered instrument from an assortment with which he sometimes amused himself cutting intaglios, Fabian, with delicate skill, took the amulet to pieces. In the process he discovered that the gold band by which the two halves of the split ruby were held together, leaving a narrow space between, was perforated

with innumerable small holes, which were concealed by the gold filigree work, in which were set the encircling pearls. Within he found several grains of a poisonous Eastern drug, so powerful that, when worn upon the person, its exhalations produced slow but certain death. He had heard of this deadly drug in his wanderings, and had once seen it. He threw the poison on the expiring coals of the brasier that stood on a tripod near him; there was a hissing as from a nest of vipers, then a blue thin flame shot up to the gold-fretted ceiling, then expired in fumes of deathly odors.

Cleansing the gem, and bathing it in perfume, Fabian folded one of the golden curls between it, then threw around his neck the old Etruscan chain to which it was suspended; and the amulet, thus consecrated by the relic of a martyr, never left its resting-place on his heart, even in death. With a bitter malediction he consigned Laodice to the evil Furies that punish crime. He laid two of the beautiful curls in the little casket that had held the amulet, marking one for Camilla and one for Zilla; and, after sealing it, directed it to the former, in care of his notary, to be delivered as soon as received. Then—beautiful thought of his pagan but faithful heart—he kindled a fire of cinnamon and spices on his brazier, and laid what was left of the golden tresses on the perfumed flame—the funeral pyre of his love—and watched them un-

til they were consumed. When the sun rose, Fabian was on board his galley going southward.

Symphronius was arrested, and brought before Olympus, a tribune, who was commanded by Valerian to torture him, by which cruel means he hoped to obtain from him the treasures of Nemesius. They stretched him upon the rack until his bones were disjoined; they tortured his flesh until every nerve in his old body was stung with pain; but his brave answer through it all was still the same: "If ye seek from me the riches of my master Nemesius, ye will not get them; for they are already distributed amongst the poor. If I am to sacrifice, I will sacrifice only to Our Lord Jesus Christ."

His glorious testimony and pious constancy excited the wonder of Olympus, who ordered the lictors to cease torturing him; the grace of God had touched the heart of the tribune, and before the dawn of another day he and his family were converted to Christianity.

When their conversion was reported to Valerian, he was frantic with rage; he ordered that Symphronius, with Olympus and his family, should be brought in chains to the Temple of the Earth, whence, after being severely tortured, they were to be taken and burned to death before the statue of the Sun, near the Flavian Amphitheatre.\* No time was lost in the execution

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\* Their bodies were borne away that night by Pope Stephen and his deacons and buried on the Via Latina.—"*Acts*."

of this cruel edict, and the victims received the crown and palm of martyrdom.

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The war with Persia, so many months impending, finally began. Sapor, at the head of an immense army, invaded the Roman possessions in the East, and was capturing cities and laying waste the lands over which he passed. Gallienus, the son of Valerian, who shared the Empire with him, was called to Rome, and charged with the defence of the West during his father's absence. Assured of victorious campaigns under the invincible Eagles, and that Sapor would be brought captive to Rome to grace a triumph, the public mind was lulled into a seductive state of ease and security, until one day, in the midst of the Saturnalian revelries, news of disaster came, which fell upon Rome like a thunderbolt. In an attempt to relieve Edessa, the Emperor had been defeated and captured, his whole army made prisoners, and the Persians were overrunning Asia Minor.

Shall we not anticipate events a little, and tell the fate of this detestable tyrant, who had so long persecuted the Church of God, and poured out the blood of His saints like water? History records that "the Persian monarch Sapor, or Shah Pur, treated his victim with the greatest indignity and cruelty. He used him as a footstool for mounting his horse, and finally ordered him to be put to death; then caused him to be



flayed, and his skin to be painted red and suspended in one of the Persian temples, as a monument of disgrace to the Romans."

Did remorse add its scorpion lash to his punishment? Did the knowledge that his thankless son Gallienus, then enjoying his Imperial dignities and power, had left him at the mercy of his ruthless enemies without making the faintest effort either by ransom or force to liberate him, sting his corrupt heart with that pang which is said to be "sharper than a serpent's tooth?" None can tell—it is only sure that vengeance is the Lord's, and He will repay.

We return now to panic-stricken Rome. Gallienus had gone to his father's villa on the Latian coast, below Ostia, for the benefit of the warm salt baths. The disastrous news from the army flew as on the wings of the wind to every camp in and around Rome, rousing the soldiers to an excitement that broke through the restraints of discipline; and the populace, recovering with quick rebound from its panic, flamed out in still more extravagant excesses than the Saturnalian license allowed, until by the time night closed over the scene a general tumult ensued, and Rome was for the present given over to lawlessness and pillage.

Before midnight the guards around the imperial palace had been driven in, and every avenue of approach to it was choked up with a drunken, yelling crowd, endeavoring to force their way in

for plunder and other crimes; and while they are battering down one of the iron-plated doors, we will enter, for what purpose will be presently seen.

The Cypriot has preceded us to the apartments of Laodice, and is advising her to gather up her jewels and gold and fly to a place of safety, to which he will conduct her. Faithful slave! confiding mistress! She fills a leather wallet with her rare, costly jewels, worth the ransom of a king; the Cypriot stuffs another with gold. They hear a frightful crash: the iron-plated door has fallen, the populace swarm in. Snatching a dark-hooded cloak, and terrified almost to death, she grasps the Cypriot's hand, and together they fly along dark passages and out through the stable—she with the jewels, her companion with the gold—a heavy enough load for a man in wild flight for life.

Passing through narrow, zigzag ways, they reach the Pincian Hill, and are tearing through a dense thicket, she slightly in advance, stumbling in the darkness, when suddenly a sharp, hot sting pierces her under the left shoulder, and she falls without a cry—dead. The Cypriot draws out his stiletto from her heart, seizes the wallet of jewels from her still warm hand, and flies on, on, on, in mad race, until by ways known to himself he reaches the Viminal, which he begins to ascend, when he is suddenly confronted by a party of half-drunken soldiers; they try to halt

him, but he breaks away, and is off again like a mountain goat, they pursuing in hot chase. They gain upon him; he is now on the Urban Way, and, weighted as he is with his plunder, he despairs of escape; for his legs tremble under him, and he feels that in a few moments they will fail him. But suddenly he thinks of the house of Hippolytus, which for some time past has been deserted; he knows it is near at hand—he sees it looming through the shadows, and by a supreme effort he collects every energy, reaches it, and disappearing within, plunges into the cellars which lead to the dungeons beyond. He hears the soldiers clattering down the stone steps in hot pursuit; he is trapped—but no—he finds a deep, narrow arch into which he slips, and as he presses himself flat against the wall, hoping to elude their search; a door gives way behind him through which he springs and finds himself in a series of dark passages winding one into another, without a ray of light to guide his course. Gods! how he runs panting and stumbling through the impenetrable gloom of those interminable galleries, until, his breath being spent, he halts to listen! No sound reaches his ears except the tumultuous thumping of his own heart; the silence of death reigns, and the hunted wretch drops exhausted. He has escaped and his plunder of gold and jewels is safe, but where is he? He had penetrated by an accident into those unexplored catacombs from which none

who had ever ventured within them had returned to tell the tale.\* Here, madly wandering through the terrible darkness, the Cypriot lived a few brief days which seemed to him like years, and to add to his despair, he once laid down his treasures to rest his waning strength for a few moments, went forward a short distance guiding his staggering footsteps by pressing close to the wall, then returning, intending to lay his head upon them and sleep—but they were not there. He had, in turning back, got into another gallery. Uttering wild shrieks and cries that rang and echoed in terrific reverberations through those black cavernous depths, and swept back upon him like a host of Furies, he beat his head against the jagged rocks, tore his flesh with his teeth, and, like the cowardly wretch he was, ended his present suffering by piercing his corrupt heart with the stiletto upon which the blood of Laodice was scarcely dry.

Tertullus fell in battle, and Camilla, accompanied by Zilla (now a Christian), and a neophyte named Cypria, retired to the old walled villa out near the Via Latina, where, in the exercise of every Christian virtue, and spending much of their time in the Catacombs, ministering to the needs of the persecuted Church, they lived until the army of Constantine, led by the Sign of the

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\*Some years ago a party of scholastics from the Propaganda ventured into this labyrinth and were lost. It is yet unexplored.

Son of Man in the heavens, overthrew the altars of the gods, and planted the Cross upon their ruins. Then was accomplished the prophecy of the seer from the Euphrates, on Mt. Phogor, in the Land of Moab, seven hundred years before the Roman Empire was founded: "They shall come in galleys from Italy; they shall overthrow the Assyrians, and waste the Hebrews; *and at the last they themselves also shall perish.*"

One day a monk, still noble-looking, though bowed with years, asked an interview with the Christian Pontiff. It was Fabian, come to deliver up the trust confided to him by Nemesisius, and turn his own wealth with it into the treasury of the Church, now no longer hiding in the Catacombs—for the shadows had fled, she had come "forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, and terrible as an army set in array." Clothed in garments of beauty, the Spouse had come forth with songs of rejoicing.

And when at last Fabian died, his remains were entombed near those of Nemesisius and his child Lucilla, by the holy priest Admetus, who knew the exact place of their repose. When preparing his body for sepulture, a ruby medalion, which clasped a curl of golden hair, was found upon his breast. "It is the relic of a martyr," said Admetus the priest, who knew what it was; "let it abide with him in death."

THE END.

## APPENDIX.

## LIKENESES OF OUR LORD.

## THE HOLY FACE.

The following tradition is from a work called "The Martyr of Golgotha," by Enrique Perez Escrich, a Spanish writer:

\* \* \* \* "Jesus had accomplished half the distance to Golgotha, when, overcome once more by the terrible weight of the cross upon His shoulders that were lacerated and inflamed by the scourging, He fell a third time to the ground. Shouts of derision and laughter greeted His fall as before. Just then a woman ran out of a neighboring house; in her hands she held a towel of the finest linen. Her name was Seraphia.

"She drew near Jesus the Nazarene, and kneeling reverently before Him said:

"'Master! let me, humble sinner that I am, wipe away the blood and dust and sweat from Thy visage with this cloth woven by my own hands.'

"'God will reward thy charity, woman,' answered Jesus: 'Behold what I leave thee in memory of this.'

"A cry of joy escaped the lips of Seraphia. The face of Jesus had remained imprinted on the linen towel she still held in her hands.

"Jesus, before continuing on his way, added:

"'Seraphia, from this day thou shalt be called VERONICA, for in thy hands have I left my *true image*.'"

To the above the following tradition, found in "The Vic-

tins of the Mamertine," by the Rev. Dr. O'Reilly, seems a fitting accompaniment:

"Tiberius Cæsar being afflicted with a most loathsome leprosy, which the skill of his physicians could neither cure nor mitigate, bethought himself one day of the strange reports sent by the Procurator of Judea to the Roman Senate relating to a certain remarkable Nazarene called Jesus Christ, who had appeared in various parts of the province and in the city of Jerusalem followed by great crowds, who hung upon his words and witnessed the wonderful things he did, such as giving sight to the blind, curing lepers, healing the sick, and raising the dead to life. A sudden ray of hope dawned on the mind of Tiberius while pondering these things, and he resolved to send with all speed for the wonder-working Nazarene to come and heal him. Losing no time, he appointed trustworthy commissioners to proceed without delay to Judea, who bore a letter from himself to Jesus requesting His presence, and were directed to conduct Him with all honor to Rome. But when the commissioners arrived at Jerusalem the first news they heard was that He whom they sought had been crucified. Knowing the violent temper of their imperial master, and that they might possibly become the victims of his disappointment, they dreaded to return, and were almost beside themselves with apprehension. While in this state of uncertainty they accidentally heard a strange story of a woman of Jerusalem called Veronica. This woman, they learned, having seen Jesus fall under the weight of His cross on His way to Calvary, ran to Him, and kneeling beside Him wiped the blood and sweat from His visage with a fine linen napkin, and that He left the image of His face upon it to reward her charity, and that when the sick and the dying looked upon it they were healed. The imperial commissioners immediately sought Veronica, and offered her ten talents for the napkin, believing that it would heal their master could he but look upon it; but Veronica declared that she would not part with it for ten thousand talents, or for all the gold in the world. Then they besought her to show it to them. This she consented

to do on condition that they would make no attempt to possess themselves of it by force, which they willingly promised. She went into her own chamber and presently returned with a square brass-bound cedar-wood box secured by locks. She lifted the lid; there was another box inside, and within that another, which she reverently opened, and, raising a cover of fine linen, showed them the Holy Face as it appeared at the moment it was miraculously impressed on the napkin.

"Finding that on no consideration would she consent to part with her sacred treasure, they appealed to her charity to accompany them to Rome, that their imperial master might look upon the holy image and be healed. She consented, moved by the same divine pity for the suffering that on the terrible day of Christ's crucifixion had led her to rush out of her house, fearless of Roman spears and Jewish hate, and wipe the blood and sweat from the face of Him they were leading away with curses and derision to the death of the cross. Arrived at Rome, Veronica was conducted to Tiberius Cæsar, where, having opened her triple cedar-wood box, she exposed the Holy Face to his view, and looking upon it he was healed of his loathsome malady."

So far the tradition, which to the devout heart is easy of belief.

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### PORTRAITS OF OUR SAVIOUR.

Tertullian and other writers of antiquity refer to portraits of our Lord which they had seen.\* It is reasonable to believe that among the numerous Greeks scattered throughout the Roman Provinces, including that of Judea, there were some artists of skill, who—like the artists of our own times—lost no opportunity to obtain the portraits of illustrious, remarkable and distinguished personages. It is not then to be supposed that a man so wonderful as Jesus the great Nazarene, who was reputed of Divine origin, wrought the most surprising miracles, and whose fame was spread abroad

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\* A very interesting collection of some of these ancient portraits of Christ appeared in a recent number of *Harper's Magazine*.



by His teaching and works, was one likely to have escaped their observation, or that they did not seek and find opportunities to sketch and perpetuate His likeness on panels of wood, carved on gems, or sculptured in basso-relievo on marble; or that the immaculate Virgin Mother did not also furnish a fruitful subject for their skill. And what is more likely than that, after the terrible drama of the crucifixion and the surprising supernatural events which succeeded it, these portraits should have been copied and reproduced, not only to satisfy the demands of His friends, but of the curious who knew His wonderful history, yet without believing in Him as a Divine Person.

Of one of these portraits, engraved on a large emerald, tradition gives a pretty authentic account. At the battle of Lepanto, where the Moslem power in Europe received its mortal blow, a brother of the Sultan was taken prisoner by the Christians. The Sultan—reigning at Constantinople, formerly the capital of the Christian world, and captured by the Moslems with all the priceless treasures of the Church that it contained—sent commissioners to Rome empowered to negotiate the release of his favorite brother. Among the invaluable treasures offered to the Pope—Innocent VIII—for his ransom, was a large emerald, on which is graven the profile face of our divine Lord, the countenance full of majesty and infinitely sad, and under it the legend: “Jesu Christe. Cut by order of Tiberius Cæsar.”

This emerald is, it is believed, still preserved among the treasures of the Vatican. Drawings, engravings and paintings have been made from it. There is a fine painting of it in the Church of the Gesu, in Rome, but the coloring seems to rob the face of some of that wonderful expression which is preserved and intensified by the simple black and white of the finely engraved copies.

There are other portraits of our Lord extant, several of them bearing a rude resemblance to the one described, which are possibly the works of those who had love as their *motif*, but not the skill to execute their desire.

Next best to the emerald likeness is a pen-portrait, which is said to be a translation from a Latin contemporary

historian of the time of Christ. The English betrays a very early period of English literature, and is almost as crude as Chaucer's. Of the authenticity of the original there is no direct proof that the writer of this is aware of; but it certainly impresses itself on the mind as a true description, which corresponds with the profile portrait graven on the emerald "by order of Tiberius Cæsar."

"News to the Senate of Rome concerning *Jesus Christ*, in the days of Tiberius Cæsar, the Emperor, as the Governors of sundry provinces under the Senate and people of Rome, used to advertise the Senate of such news as chanced in divers countries.

"Publius Lentules, being at that time President in Judea, wrote an epistle to the Senate and people of Rome, the words whereof were these:—

"There has appeared in these, our days, a man of great virtue named Jesus Christ, who is yet living amongst us, and of the Gentiles is accepted as a prophet of Truth, but his own disciples call him the Son of God. He raiseth the dead, and cureth all manner of diseases. A man of stature, somewhat tall and comely, with a very reverend countenance, such as the beholder may both love and fear; his hair the color of a filbert full ripe, and plain almost down to his ears, but from the ears downward somewhat curled and more orient of color, waving on his shoulders. In the midst of his head goeth a seam or partition of his hair, after the manner of the Nazarites; his forehead very plain and smooth; his face without spot or wrinkle, beautified with a comely red; his nose and mouth so formed as nothing can be reprehended; his beard somewhat thick, agreeable in color to the hair of his head; in the midst of an innocent and mature look, his eyes gray, clear and quick. In reproving he is terrible; in admonishing, courteous and fair-spoken; pleasant in his speech, mixed with gravity. It cannot be remembered that any have seen him laugh, but many have seen him weep. In proportion of body, well shaped and straight, his hands and arms right and delectable to behold; in speaking, very temperate, modest and wise. A man for singular beauty surpassing the children of men."















